University of Alberta

What Downcasting Canna Bide: Language and Class in *Mary Barton*

By

Jan Kristian Olesen

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English
Edmonton Alberta
Fall 2001

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Degree: Master of Arts

Year This Degree Granted: 2001

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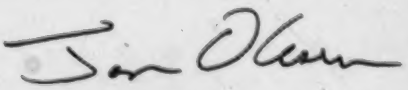

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University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis titled *Downcasting Canna Bide: Language and Class in Mary Barton* submitted by Jan Olesen in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Within the context of nineteenth century social reform, Elizabeth Gaskell writes *Mary Barton.* With the dramatic restructuring of labor in the early nineteenth century, many political economists understood there was a feeling of alienation amongst the work force. Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* emphasizes a desire to reestablish a lost sense of communication, and dialogue as a method of social repair. With an eye toward predominant social intervention and political economy of the nineteenth century, this thesis investigates Elizabeth Gaskell's emphasis on communication, and, her deployment of Lancashire dialect and a linguistic gloss as a method of humanitarian intervention.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those whose advice and guidance contributed to the completion of this thesis. For the confidence and council and of my advisor Susan Hamilton I am extremely grateful, as I am also for my second and third readers Peter Sinnema and Henry Klumpenhuwer.

I would also like to thank my entire family for their support and encouragement throughout the last year: mom and dad for encouraging me to enjoy my work, Sten for telling me that grad school really shouldn't be like summer camp and Siri and Steve for helping me strike a balance between the two.

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Chapter One: Placing *Mary Barton*

Walter Benjamin's oft quoted "there is no document of Civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Illuminations 256) would likely ring hollow to the nineteenth century individual. History, now considered a discourse where meaning is retroactively located through subject positioning[1], was in the nineteenth century largely construed as a thing objectively fixed. Similarly, antagonism now often understood as a natural byproduct of any social/political system was a cause for alarm in the nineteenth century. Much of nineteenth century political economic thought understood a society's ability to order itself through labor, policy making, policing etc., as essential. This all suggests an organic class division necessary for society to operate successfully.

In the nineteenth century the notion of class was defined in many different ways. Family history, net income, job security, gender and education, all illustrate different facets to the concept of class and culture. Thinking broadly, each of these elements are parts of a greater system of cultural production, and, this production, be it material or ideological, is what makes up culture proper. The goal of society is, then, to emphasize the production of social-economic guidelines which stabilize any given society and urge self production. With Laclau and Mouffe, Lacan, Žižek finding antagonism in place of order, we have become comfortable with the instability inherent in democracy. However, many nineteenth-century thinkers believed that turmoil was a negative reflection on the stability of a society. Unrest was a blow to the collective psyche of a nation. In the early nineteenth century, many popular political economic theorists saw a stable social structure threatened by industrial capitalism. Nascent consumer culture was recreating new forms of labor division, asserting new forms

of social and political power, and undermining established social orders in the process.

It is out of the social unrest of the 1830's and 40's that Elizabeth Gaskell writes *Mary Barton*. Her claim in the preface to know nothing of political economy does not undermine the assumption that Gaskell writes this novel, at least in part, to address certain social problems. Her goal was not simply to present an interesting story, but to present what she saw as social injustices within the England of her day. Set in the heart of the 1840's Chartist movement, Gaskell attempts to bridge what she sees as the widening gulf between the middle-class and the lower-class worker. Her attempt to recreate the social/cultural currency between classes, and their mutual methods of representation is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Creating an accurate and realistic picture of lower class life, free from stereotype, requires a 'stepping outside' of conventional middle-class methods of representation-representation that routinely employs stereotype as a narratological tool. My point of departure will be to look at the elements Gaskell employs in her representation of the social "reality" of England, against the backdrop of contemporary political economic thought of the mid nineteenth century.

Gaskell's construction of class within *Mary Barton* balances notions of class defined through bloodlines with economic representations of class division initiated by a middle class rise to power. The rise of the captains of industry threatened traditional aristocratic power with market diversity, growth and expansion as its source of power. Rapid growth in industry and a general increase in the wealth of England, ushered in a diverse and influential middle class. As economic might posited an alternate social contract by itself, the aristocratic fear of traditional political power's erosion was well founded. Within the context of nineteenth

century English economic reform, the philosophy of philanthropy and social improvement, I will look at Gaskell's picture of the social contract and her position on its repair. These findings will have implications in repositing the effect of Gaskell's social theory in relation to contemporary twentieth century linguistic and social philosophers.

My main focus in distinguishing class differentiation is on a specific narrative aid, the gloss Gaskell inserts to define certain words; I will investigate what assumptions are implicit by its presence in the text, and how it impacts both the reader. All of these disparate themes relate in one way or another to class structure, and are faced by the characters in the novel with sometimes mixed results.

Political History of 1830's and 1840's England

Perhaps the most significant event of nineteenth century England took place in eighteenth century France. With much of early nineteenth century England reeling from the monumental disappointment of the French revolution, social reform was caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of progressive and regressive reform. Some, like the Young Englanders group, grounded a return to the ethics of feudal paternalism in the disastrous movement of social reform born out in France's revolution. Others found that the flourishing of a relatively new economic system needed new concepts of social cohesion to go with it. The rise of capitalism supplanting feudalism was the paradigm shift which created new working spaces, which sharply defined and rearranged conventional conceptions of public as well as private space. There was, however, little argument that social cohesion in labor was in a state of crisis. From the turn of the century to 1830, there were were at least nine major strikes and an equal number of minor ones in the town of Manchester alone. As Chartism became a

popular working class response to what was seen as middle-class tyranny, the message received by the upper classes was that the social fabric was in tatters and its repair was imperative for the survival, not of only themselves, but of the English nation.

One of the chief concerns of the French Revolution was the ideologues' dream of finding, or creating, an egalitarian classless society. Thoughts of a classless society lingered in some of the more idealistic early nineteenth century thinkers as a possible and attainable goal. However, a new and powerful mercantile class was out to flex its muscles, desiring to distance itself from the lower/working class, and either become, or depose, the aristocracy. The aristocracy on the other hand was desperately trying to hold on to the political and social power it had inherited. The advent of capitalism saw a dramatic shift in the class structure, often wrought out of aristocratic fears of a total loss of political power. The ethos of capitalism trumpets material wealth as the key to power, and, within its own system, it largely delivers on that promise. As the middle classes saw their social power, within the factories, derive from material wealth, the ability to obtain and retain wealth became an indicator of the ability to wield power. There was nothing new in locating authority with material wealth. The aristocracy had been using wealth -in the form of land- as a means of control long before the middle class. However, the aristocracy never saw it as the fundamental source of their power, a feeling that intensified when the middle class became, in many cases, their economic superiors. Until the 1800s, property was a prerequisite to hold public office, and was a requirement to vote until 1832. The Reform act of 1832 extended voting rights, via a householders franchise, to those whose rent exceeded 10 pounds per year. This particular political act, according to F.M.L. Thompson, was an attempt by the upper

class to bring the middle classes on side. The middle classes realized that they needed powerful political representation in order to sustain their freedom in the adjudication of the factories. The aristocracy knew this as well, and hoped to stem further encroachment on their source of power by cutting their losses, and allowing the middle class to amalgamate with the aristocracy. The attempt was to dissuade any association of middle and lower classes by creating an us vs. them mentality. The ethic of moral stability related to affluence and lodgings however, remained. A person with adequate lodgings was considered to have adequate moral fiber to vote, and, conversely, those who could not attain domestic stability, were considered to have not yet attained moral stability. Thompson suggests that this act was a definitive moment in the construction of class:

> It has often been remarked that this action [The 1832 Reform act] defined, even created, the working classes by lumping together all those unable to afford to occupy a house of at least 10 pounds annual value as unfit to exercise the franchise, thus forging a common bond of resentment and frustration between otherwise diverse social groups.
>
> (Thompson 16)

The significance of this social bond is that each group is, according to the model of enfranchisement, without political agency. The working classes are those who do not have the required material goods, and are thus excluded from the political process, unable to participate in the construction of the social contract. They are not a self forming class, like the mercantile class, but rather were formed out of political negation, and material absence.

This material absence mirrors their political and social absence, informing the inability of this particular class to represent themselves. They must rely on the representation from another class to act as agent for them.

The Paternal Paradox

The argument that new class formations needed new theories of social cohesion versus the belief that social stability lay in tried and true methods of social cohesion found a dialectical meeting point in the concept of paternalism. Both the aristocracy and the mercantile middle class argued for particular paternalistic notions, showing the concept of paternalism to be as ideologically malleable as rhetoricians were willing to make it. Working as an ideological double agent, paternalism embodied the ideology of both sides but with dramatically different interpretations.

The basic substance of the paternalist ethic is a standard 'father knows best' patriarchal system of authority. The father of the household was to lead by example, demonstrating to his family and community the standard of morality and ethical conduct. The Patriarch was to be the solid and uncontested leader of the household, responsible for the moral development of the 'children' and the allocation of various social duties. Mary Poovey tells us in *Making a Social Body*, that the ideological construct of social interaction was often described using metaphors of the body. The social body, and the division of class, was seen as a giant human body, each with its own needs, responsibilities and benefits. The middle class saw an economic division born out in the physical metaphor, laborers as the extended corporeal body and the administrative 'mind' as the masters. The basis for this claim to authority came from increased mercantile power. The fact that the middle classes had

brought themselves up from the mass of the poor showed that they had earned the right to rule. This fact for the aristocracy was evidence of their inability to control social policy. Governance over social policy was not to be taken lightly. At stake in the debate was the voice of the community and the nation. Those who had political representation were not only in possession of a means of self representation but were responsible for the representation of those who were a part of the more 'corporeal' parts of the body. The connection is suggestive of an intimate setting, as the head should implicitly know of ailments of the body and also realize that attention to these problems is in the best interest of the whole body. So too should a father know the situation of his family. Though traditional paternalist ethics have been soundly vilified by modern feminism, Holy Pike finds that "in the nineteenth century this was far from the case. Paternalism was not then a theory to account for the way the roles of women and other groups are determined by social structures, but a theory of the ideal basis on which to constitute class relations" (Pike 6). The twentieth century preoccupation with power politics and the ways in which various social systems dictate social action were, according to Pike, not concepts included in the nineteenth century political debate. It was tacitly understood that there was a correct way in which to order society; it was simply a matter of finding it.

The Aristocracy: Everything old is new again

For the aristocracy the answer to labor strife was simple: paternalism was an intimate setting that only the upper class knew, and, thus, in spite of the increased wealth of the mercantile middle classes, the aristocracy alone were to control social policy. Holly Pike cites David Roberts' *Paternalism in Victorian England* which traces the roots of paternalism

from medieval sources, finding that paternalism grew out of feudalism: "from Scott to Disraeli, the feudal organization of society is presented as ideal for the love it fosters between classes by making them dependent on each other" (Pike 7). The paternalist ethic is essentially a model of social hierarchy based upon the division of power in family relations. Holly Pike claims that "the governing classes learned their ideas of how to deal with their subordinates from observing the structure of their own families" (Pike 8). This posits the father, the patriarch, as the absolute head of the household. The treatment and guidance of the children in the family requires a personal connection. The success of the family's future depends on the successful development of the child.

The aristocratic perspective of proper social construction was outlined by a group of landowning aristocratic political representatives called Young England. Young Englanders expressed alarm in the apparent decay of traditional institutions and values. The leading members of the group were Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, George Smythe, Lord John Manners and Benjamin Disraeli, all of whom were members of what was by the early nineteenth century a largely eroded land owning aristocracy. The focus of Young England was to restore aristocratic authority and influence. It seems only natural that their social commentary focused primarily on a critique of the middle class, as it was the middle class who threatened traditional structures of political power and authority. The rhetoric of these influential men insinuated causation of many social ills to the management of the factories. According to Mark Francis and John Morrow, although "Young England[ers] were affected deeply by the atomization and degradation produced by the factory system" (Francis & Morrow 175), they found the structure of the factory system to be predisposed to a positive

social order. Lord John Manners believed that:

> There was never...so complete a feudal system as that of the mills; soul and body are, or might be, at the absolute disposal of one man, and that to my notion is not at all a bad state of society" (Whibley, Lord John Manners pp 100, 106) The real evil of the factory system was that it combined complete dependence with uncertainty of future employment and irresponsibility on the part of employers. There was nothing wrong with dependence, provided that it was accompanied by continuity and humane responsibility, but this was not the case under existing conditions.
>
> (Francis & Morrow 175/6)

The positive aspect of the factory system was its way of fixing a single person as absolute authority, similar to the feudal system. This system should be a microcosm of a larger social construction. Reasoning that the feudal system had worked in the past, and that the factory system was almost identical to feudalism, labor unrest in modern England was due to the ineffective leadership within the factories. We can see here the connection to a paternalist ethic. In order for the factory system to work it needed to be controlled by 'one man' in absolute control. The problem fro Manners was not the system itself, but those operating it.

For Young England, the right of power had become tainted with the mercantile authority of the middle class. Young England measured leadership ability within certain specific attributes: heritage, title, and bloodlines. Family history explicitly demonstrated inclusion in the aristocracy. This would, of course, exclude any individual who lacked the

familial pedigree, ultimately preventing the 'captains of industry' from buying class status. Working within the paternalist model, we see that there are two definitions for the children of the patriarch. Young England's notion of paternalism was one where certain parts of the social body could not change. The definition of the Patriarch's children in aristocratic paternalism was split into categories of actual biological children and the metaphorical children of the lower classes. It was this certain materiality, connected in a vague way with a selective sense of history, that outlined the aristocratic claim to social control. The patriarchal structure of one father presenting a good example to his children shows that the aristocracy were guilty of the cardinal sin of playing favorites. The mantle of power was passed on in an exclusive relationship, from father to *biological* son. Though there was a responsibility to the larger populous of the English people, who would also benefit from observing the positive example of the aristocracy, these metaphorical 'children' were incapable of attaining the position of aristocrat. Fixing social class in this way was for the aristocracy a way to put a definitive end to social disobedience. The feeling that any person could become a master undermined the authority of all the masters. In Young England's view, if the master was no better than a worker, the worker would have more reason to rise up in revolt against their masters. If the peasantry and the aristocracy were fixed categories there would be a source of truth. The lower classes would know that the aristocracy were their social betters.

The notion that the lower classes must mimic morality observed in the aristocracy suggests social stasis, prohibiting class ascension. This overtly states an innate superiority of the aristocracy to whom the low classes should defer. Young England believed in an

organic class structure, one that would assert itself given the proper circumstances. Social betterment through mercantilism, served only to deceive the lower orders into thinking they could somehow earn social perfection. The spark of possibility in everyone gave rise to greed, excessive self interest, workers thinking they deserved more than they were getting from their masters, in short labor strife. Young England also saw the opposite ethic at work, rebellion caused by need. This points to the middle class' ineffective management within the factories. For these reasons, Young England desired implementation of certain social interventions (factory reform) but opposed others. They were in favor of factory reform, chiefly to control the masters, and by extension the workers, but against organized philanthropy. This is certainly not an iron fisted method of social control, but, rather, a rigorously defined mode of social division designed to arrest any unrest due to the very possibility of social ascension.

If the responsible governance of the aristocracy were to be restored, the lower class would naturally be inclined to be submissive and thankful towards their providers. If the cultural currency of the aristocracies 'good example' was to be restored, the people, spurred on by example, would know how to behave and fall into line. To the Aristocracy, the poor needed periodical, if not constant, refueling. As Young England claimed that the masses of English would benefit from the ethical example of the aristocracy, they resisted class integration on the basis of the capabilities of those influenced. The lower classes needed both constant moral vigilance and the knowledge that they are beyond social redemption.

The Middle classes: You say Paternal and I say?

There was no need for the aristocracy to impress upon the mercantile middle classes

the fact that there was labor strife in early Victorian England. As owners of mills and factories they knew first hand the political actions of the working classes. The middle classes were also eager to find a way out of the labor trouble that seemed to constantly plague England. The middle classes and aristocracy shared many common goals. They both saw that a fundamental connection between the 'masters and men' had somehow been disrupted, that the key to social repair lay in somehow reestablishing that lost intimacy between the masters and the workers through paternalism. How then, do aristocratic methods of social repair differ from middle class versions? Though the middle-class version of paternalism also bears a resemblance to feudalism, as Morrow suggests, there is a difference between aristocratic and middle class paternalism. The central difference is the unchanging nature of feudalism. The middle class desired a class system and saw a kind of innateness in their claim to social control, but their claim to power lay in an achieved fortune rather than an inherited one. Accomplishment made the difference in how or whether someone should be given the keys to the kingdom, not a history of rulership.

Where the aristocracy presented more or less a unified front, refraction of mercantile middle class ideology grew with its numbers. As mentioned, the mercantile classes were an amalgamation of several different classes. It was not uncommon for former mill workers to become mill owners through luck and shrewd financial investments; but where the aristocracy found the lack of social history the middle class's Achilles' heel, the middle class themselves saw it as their greatest strength. As middle-class people assumed the mantle of social power through economic fortune, drawing members to its class from a wide variety of backgrounds, their political and social views were naturally as heterogenous as the class

itself. With the change in their economic and social fortunes, they needed to ground authority in something other than the aristocratic ideal of proper breeding. The one constant within middle class ideology was the value of the path to authority. It was an active process, where low-class people took charge and 'made themselves,' rather than follow the edicts of outdated conventions of authority. Where the aristocracy took a passive route to authority the middle-class preferred a pro-active stance, where action and economic acumen held sway. The new industrial capitalist was a self-made man, risen up and out of the masses of the poor. The power of nineteenth century middle-class ideology lay in a type of anti history where the background of the individual is devalued in favor of production. The ability to produce was seen as the measure of the individual both morally and socially.

Though the middle classes parted ways with the aristocracy in the 'blood relations' concept of class structure, there was still a strong sense of need for class division. For newly mechanized England, the middle class needed a class structure that worked to underwrite its basis of power. The working class still needed to behave in a certain manner in order for the means of production to fulfill the power nexus of the middle class. The workers had essentially to buy into a position as exploited laborers within the capitalist system, believing that riches and power were an immanent possibility.

A central tenet of middle-class ideology was the accessibility of power to all which implicitly states equal footing. Some, like W.R Greg, used this ideology to remove any responsibility of master to worker:

> The first duty which the great employer of labour owes to those who work for him is to make his business succeed...This...imposes upon the

> employer the duty of not allowing any benevolent plans or sentiments of lax kindness interfere with the main purpose in view...Neither the most boundless benevolence, not the most consummate ability, can fight against the clear moral and material laws of the universe...We cannot raise the mass out of their misery-they must raise themselves.'
>
> (Kidd and Roberts11-12)

The free market meant ultimate freedom which in turn meant ultimate responsibility. If the employer was to coddle his worker, Greg argues, the worker would lose the zeal for middle-class achievement and the whole program of capitalism would be threatened. Capitalism meant rigorous economic, social and moral self fashioning. Any outside interference into the natural progression of the marketplace threatened the whole social order. The ethic of 'equal opportunity' made class division malleable yet constant. Though each person had the chance to assume greatness, it was attained by fulfilling a position as 'worker' more shrewdly than the rest of the workers. Without this codified class distinction, with each member of society fulfilling her/his allotted role, the very possibility of achieving middle-class status would be impossible.

As both sides in the struggle for power believed in a definable class system we can see that in both situations the lower-classes were in a sense fated to their lot. They were either inherently a member of the lower classes through heritage, or unable or unwilling to climb the social ladder in the same way the middle classes had. Each assumes an organic, natural organization of society. Both sides suggested that there were innate qualities that dictated class status, and, thus, the working classes were not a part of the debate. Both the

aristocracy and the middle classes agreed that the situation of labor in England was a problem that was to be solved, not a voice to be heard. Civil disobedience was a form of terrorism not a means of communication; there was no thought given to the ramifications of suppressing a voice.

Where is this voice coming from?

The concept of voice and agency in the nineteenth century were intimately bound up with notions of materiality. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, political representation was secured through wealth (see 4 above) and despite loosening voting eligibility requirements, universal suffrage was many years away. The fundamental imbalance between the working and middle class 'voice' was how a social voice was legitimated. The working classes had considerable power, arguably greater than the middle class, and expressed themselves forcefully in many ways, but working class expression was either not recognized or recognized as illegitimate. If strike action and labor violence was due to working class frustration at being left out of the political process, the majority of the middle classes refused to include themselves in the equation. It was the responsibility of the lower classes to either become like the middle class by attaining similar same material success, or to behave like proper subjects. This valuation relates directly to representation. Material possessions did not simply buy representation, but the ability to amass material possessions demonstrated a legitimate ability to self representation.

Allying materiality to morality was an easy move for both middle and upper class. Thompson tells us in *The Rise of Respectable Society* that, in the nineteenth century, it was often asserted that the lower classes, those who claimed to be destitute, were in fact earning

a sustenance wage.[2] The downfall of the working poor was not due to inadequate income but foolish spending habits or excessive indulgence in alcohol. This type of propaganda endorsed middle-class ideas that there was some moral quality that allowed power to be gained. The middle class ascension to power and representation was represented in a perverse paralogism: some have become wealthy, *ergo*, the possibility exists for all. This retains the possibility of middle-class status without examining how it is realistically achieved, and, locates the fixity of the lower class in the lower class person itself. The implication here is clear: those who had somehow been able to lift themselves up from the mass of the poor were those who had the moral strength to resist temptation and understood how to succeed within the new capitalist economy. The man able to raise himself to agency, was, then, set apart from the working-class individual, both morally and intellectually.

Though the middle classes assumed a moral and political superiority over the working classes, the situation of the working classes was not something that the middle class took for granted. Even the most dogmatically conservative factory-owner would understand that the workers were responsible, at least in part, for his ability to amass wealth. It would seem illogical to perceive the lower classes as somehow lacking in moral and economic abilities and then abandon the working classes to their own devices. The fact that the working class had not achieved middle-class status meant that they cannot and need help living their lives. This meant that the middle class had to communicate in some way with their workers. The matter of working-class representation was taken up by many writers who intended to represent the unrepresented- to explain the situation of the working classes in an attempt to better the society. Within the realm of fiction, Disraeli became a prominent voice

for and from the aristocracy, Elizabeth Gaskell was often cited as the middle-class voice of the poor. The difference in the two author's writing styles bears out the ideological difference between middle class conceptions of social improvement and aristocratic notions of social improvement. Kate Flint argues that *Mary Barton* is the embodiment of the paternalist ideal. This paternalism was often viewed as a method of social repair, and social intervention but, as I shall discuss in more detail later, any social intervention needed to be organized and regulated. There was a real concern on the part of the middle class, though at times disingenuous or self serving, for the situation of the lower classes. And though the overt elitism of Young England was rejected, the middle class often simply found more subtle ways to express their superiority.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that the middle-class was culled from the lower class presented the possibility of middle-class status to everyone. The idealism of this ethic was portrayed in a particular literary genre called the Bildungsroman novel. The Bildungsroman novel presented moral education of its protagonist as an essential aspect of the 'rags to riches' story, ultimately moving towards social unity and the amalgamation of class. This social movement borrowed the structure of earlier Protestant spiritual narratives but supplanted Christian salvation and spiritual unity with an individual sense of cultural and social unity. T. Thomas claims social unity for the lower class amounts to the rejection of lower-class identity and conventional Christian conceptions of eternal salvation: 'The state of grace is replaced by secularized concepts of social and personal identity; but the movement is always away from social origins, and out of the mass of the poor' (Thomas 195). The traditional salvific theme is one that would necessitate the rejection of other

religions, sin, Satan etc, moving towards an ultimate completeness and unification symbolized in the protagonist's ascension to heaven. An equivalent is middle-class mercantile ideology. The luxury of acquiring the Christian God or the culture and privilege of the middle class requires a similar moral imperative. Thomas claims that the secular move in Victorian fiction is not a shift in moral values, but in the materiality of the end goal. The poor are represented as not whole, in the same way that the non-Christian/heathen is. The movement out of the mass of the poor is the attainment of social wholeness. The Bildungsroman novel, then, presents the lower classes as having their own distinct culture and identity, just as the non Christian does, but it is one that is fundamentally flawed.

All Not All

What was seen as the relative incompleteness of the lower classes led to a spate of humanitarian efforts. The design, in theory, was to create a sense of unification of the individual as a method of limiting social unrest. The need for these humanitarian efforts intricately linked various material realities to social tendencies. That is, if the working classes were poor it was because of some lack: if they were becoming ill, it was because they were unaware of proper hygiene. If this lack is understood as a lack of money, obviously the solution for social wholeness is to increase income. However, the middle class saw the problem not in a constitutive lack of any specific thing but an inability of the working class to fully understand its significance. The middle classes understood political economy, worked hard and therefore were wealthy, the working class did not and were poor. With a material and ideological rift between various strata of class, many techniques were utilized in an attempt to understand the object of philanthropy. The Sanitary Report of 1842 was just

such an attempt to know the invisible poor. Instigated by social administrator Edwin Chadwick, the report featured endless case studies of the state of the lower class and its habits, an analysis at times presuming empirical precision by measurements of such inanities as the annual output of excrement. Both Chadwick and Smith saw making the poor more like the middle class the solution to many social problems. Again there is a salvific notion of redemption for the lower classes extended by the middle class. However, this notion resisted the lower classes becoming 'just like' the middle class for a watered down 'more like' the middle class. Though most social improvement campaigns were undertaken in the name of social unity, there was a resistance to complete integration; the middle class still wished to believe that the cause of poverty lay in the actions of the poor themselves rather than in the capitalist machine.

That the middle classes believed in organized social improvement schemes and philanthropy marks a radical break with aristocratic ideology. The critical distance observed by the aristocratic notion of philanthropy preserves a moral authority, implicit superiority and the inefficacy of efforts to change/educate the poor. The middle class regarded social interaction and improvement as universal improvement. If undertaken recklessly, philanthropy was considered potentially harmful. Michael E. Rose argues that "Causal contact and random giving between rich and poor were inadequate, even dangerous. Philanthropy to be effective must be organized, and regular contact between givers and receivers could best be achieved through a scheme of visiting the homes of the poor" (Rose 105). This ethic takes its cue from the belief that the bedrock of Young England's theory of social cohesion was fundamentally unsound. Philanthropy for the aristocracy was an action

taken not in any organized way, but enacted because of the gentleman's unwritten code of conduct towards his social inferior. The act of charity towards the poor was a laissez faire social policy, one where moral qualities were learned by observation rather than any organized implementation of education or philanthropy. The natural 'affinity' between the rich and poor that Young England believed once existed between rich and poor was based on an innate respect for title. This was seen as an outdated concept to many middle-class people, unworthy of revival. Many of those who held power of a different sort, the political economist and fiction writer, "were deliberately eschewing what they saw as unsatisfactory and outmoded approaches to political theorising" (Francis &Morrow 4).

As mentioned earlier, there were economic reasons for enforcing class difference. The need for workers to work was a requirement of not only factory labor, but of feudal divisions of labor. When it came to assistance for the poor, it was done with as much an eye towards self interest/preservation as it was for altruistic reasons. The metaphor of the social body (see Mary Poovey above) was usually invoked to project the need for governmental intervention. Interventions such as the sanitary act of 1842, were designed to locate a specific social problem, but also an attempt to 'know' the unrepresented. Any action taken from the results of the sanitary report was enacted as much for the protection of the upper class as it was aid to the poor. Implicit in the attempt to 'know' the poor is the notion of their lack of representation, the inability of the working class to present themselves to the rest of society. The middle class saw this as a sign that the poor could not "represent themselves, [and]they need[ed] to be represented" (Marx 124).

Studies of the poor and their living habits proliferated in the nineteenth century; from

Engels, to Chadwick, to a host of physicians and doctors, the attempt was to reveal the condition of the working poor. Whether locating moral inadequacies or flaws within the lower class of people, or to illustrate their exploitation due to fortune or unsympathetic masters, the poor were seen to be a culture apart from the upper and middle classes. One of the more colorful accounts of the life of the poor was Henry Mayhew's work *London Labor and London Poor*. Mayhew's proto-sociological study of London's poor is exhaustive in its research of testimonial evidence, and in his attempt to produce an empirical book chronicling the situation of the poor often uses terminology and methods borrowed from ethnographic studies done abroad. Christopher Herbert finds that Mayhew refers to the culture of the London poor in terms borrowed from Polynesian Ethnographic studies. Here, the poor are seen as distinct, but hardly represented in an approving light. Often Mayhew refers to the anomic desire of the London Poor as analogous to the unbridled passions of the Polynesian 'savages'. The Jesuit missionaries difficulty in wooing the Polynesian savage to Christian morality mirrors for Mayhew the difficulty in educating the London poor in the ways of proper hygiene. Mayhew perpetuates the stereotype of the lower classes as vermin and spreaders of disease by comparing the poor to the London brown rat.

The distance between the upper and lower classes, as defined by Mayhew, depicts an environment that profoundly effects the actions of the individual. Mayhew traces the source of moral laxity in the London poor to their lack of material fixity. The Polynesian nomad, considered to display anomic desire most sharply, was so considered because of their physical movement. Transience and a reluctance to acquire property was related to the moral stability of the people. Fixing this apparatus on the culture of London, the corollary is

obvious: the poor are morally suspect because of their lack of stable lodgings, that is, because of their poverty.

With an unstable and transient population moving about the country, social improvement became an imperative for the protection of the English nation. A central motivator for philanthropic action was the belief that the maladies of the lower classes were contagious, potentially effecting the upper classes by proximity. Various epidemics of cholera throughout nineteenth century England presented the stark reality that all classes were potential victims of the deadly disease. The need to organize a system of education and raise social consciousness to promote cleanliness seemed a good idea, and one that would potentially benefit all English people. But there is a definite salvific theme, one that expresses a hierarchy of social awareness and a need for social improvement among a certain section of the population. Elitism expressed by Young England though natural rank and heritage, was ratified for the middle class in elitism through education, or the lack. The campaign to fix the hygienic problem specifically locates the origin of dirt and contagion within the lower classes. This lack of education and hygienic practices within the lower classes threatened to undermine the whole of English civilization, and, the rigorous action taken against the actions of the poor locates the source of contagion within the lower classes. It also marks off the difference between the middle and low classes through knowledge.

The knowledge of the middle classes and their understanding of proper hygienic practices extended further than simple educational superiority. Leonore Davidoff finds that tropes of cleanliness related directly to the moral fiber of the individual. Locating the difference between the middle and lower classes in the material signifier of domestic service,

that is, those who could afford servants as middle/upper class and those who were servants as the lower class, Davidoff extends her study to include the moral implications of servitude. Within her study of the servant trade in nineteenth century England, Davidoff finds that there was a sense in Victorian England, that the family that could afford servants was in some way 'more clean', both physically and morally, than those who could not; it was as if "the servant (and the servant class as a whole) absorbed the dirt and lowliness into their own bodies" (Davidoff 5). She goes on to say that "Dirt is the natural emblem and consequence of vice. Cleanliness in house and dress and person is the proper type and visible sign of a virtuous mind and of a heart renewed by the holy spirit" (Davidoff 25). By making dirt the natural consequence of vice, the middle classes could distinguish themselves from the lower by outward appearance. The subtext that underwrites this analysis is, once again, that the poor are poor because they are unclean/immoral, and are unclean/immoral because they are poor.

The connection of the laborer and the domestic worker is more closely aligned than one might at first think. Many within the middle classes thought paternalist structures of labor the ideal. A strong and influential master could be a powerful role model to his workers, who naturally could benefit from observation his actions. Though this is similar to Young England ideology, Young England could not agree as the masters were often former members of the working class. Young England stressed a casual approach to philanthropy, believing that personal contact establishes a stronger bond of loyalty than faceless organized social improvement campaigns. Though the near universal plea is to reconstruct a lost connection between upper and lower classes, the terminology is fraught with language that presents the opposite. Francis and Morrow find evidence of Young England ideology in the

works of fiction written by Disraeli: "In *Conningsby*, Disraeli's 'Young England' novel, Lord Henry Sydney (a character based closely on Manners) refers to a 'parochial constitution' in which the peasantry were recognized as an 'ancient, legal, ...order'" (Francis &Morrow 175). Implicit is the concept of stasis, that the lower classes are ancient, and, as suggested earlier, subservient. Stasis for those in power allows them to remain in power. But, as we have seen with the Bildungsroman novel, the social conscience of Victorian England had more on its mind.

The suggestion that the peasantry belonged to an 'ancient order' is related to Mackey's borrowed ethnographic approach. The encounter with other cultures was understood in relation to the moral structure of the visiting ethnographer. This led to a temporal displacement of the observed, in what Johannes Fabian called allochronism. In *Time and the Other,* Fabian defines allochronism as the denial of coevalness, or a tendency to regard an observed culture as belonging to an earlier time. The apparent primitive cultural state of the encountered native, one that seemingly thwarted cultural mores of the ethnographer, led to the tendency to locate foreign cultures within the temporal context of the observer, creating the sense of a universal past. Thus, the Polynesian native, due to their perceived technological poverty, would be seen at the 'primitive' state of development analogous to pre turn of the millennium Europe. This belief relies on a linear sense of time, and a social Darwinist sense of progress, as distance in time means nothing to cultural development within an elliptical concept of progress. Using this same sense of distance, upper class people looking at lower classes could locate them temporally (as Disraeli does above), creating distance and a sense of technological, social and linguistic superiority. The

same concept is utilized when middle class people use education, and the imagery of moral improvement in the Bildungsroman novel to locate the low classes in a materially distant time.

Fabian presents the shortcomings of this method, claiming that the use of various terms, though not themselves temporal in nature, indicate a denial of coevalness. The use of the term primitive, or in Mayhew's case the urchin, vagrant and even the poor, come to contain the same currency, and a denial of coevalness. Fabian also critiques the very use of culturally generated naming, which gets in the way of describing the object of study accurately:

> A discourse employing terms such as primitive, savage (but also Tribal, Traditional, Third World, or whatever euphemism is current) does not think, or observe, or critically study, the 'primitive'; it thinks, observes, studies in terms of the primitive. Primitive being essentially a temporal concept, is a category, not an object, of Western thought.
>
> (Fabian 18 italics his)

Fabian here undermines the categories the western thinking mind uses to understand its object. Considering the consistent similarity in ethnographic research, and the study of the London Poor undertaken by Henry Mayhew, it is clear that the London poor were taken as not only culturally inferior, but behind contemporary thinking and morality, and may even be the source of their moral condition. They are caught in a cycle where their poverty informs

class is demarcated in a myriad of ways. We see that class cohesion understood by those in power suggests a connection between the lower class and the ruling class that often disenfranchises the poor rather than enfranchises, focusing more on legitimating a power source than hearing legitimate concerns of the working poor. In several unique ways, the novel *Mary Barton* presents the working class in a way that at once illustrates the social problem without reducing the working class character to a construct of the middle class mind. How some of the characters in *Mary Barton* fall into the categories mentioned here, and how others seemingly traverse the moral and social pitfalls attests to the truth claims of Victorian ideology, while at the same time undermining it and urging a social and material change.

How Do We read *Mary Barton*?

The construction of a novel, especially in the nineteenth century, is often assumed to be pragmatic and tedious. Accounts of various famous nineteenth century authors work often presents the nuts and bolts of book writing as a paint by numbers affair. The examples are legend. From the myth of Trollope holding a day job at the post office while writing in the morning, with a schedule that stipulated a specific number of words a day, to Dickens scouring feedback letters to adhere to public opinion of what tack his novels should take, the nineteenth century ethos of writing seems miles away from its Romantic predecessor. Though the truth claims of some of these stories have suffered under the scrutiny of serious scholarly efforts, the novel is often assumed to be the product of careful planning rather than a spontaneous outpouring of powerful emotion. At the request of her publisher, Gaskell superimposes a preface in hopes of changing the perspective of the reader from assuming the

book to be an artificial construct, cold and calculated, to an urgent plea for moral justice. In the preface, Gaskell tells us that she was in fact initially working on a different book before the impetus for *Mary Barton* struck her. Gaskell claims she is drawn to write *Mary Barton* because of a powerful moral awakening, her heightened awareness of the plight of the worker. The emotional way in which Gaskell presents this revelation to the reader is a deliberate attempt to impose a hermeneutic direction on the reader in the guise of moral inspiration:

> . . . My first thought was to find a frame-work for my story in some rural scene; and I had already made a little progress . . . when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alterations of between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men."
>
> (*Mary Barton* 37)

Her confession gives a real, visceral feeling to the work, not only directing the reception of the novel but outlining her unique abilities to deal with this subject matter. She is also aligning herself and drawing attention to a sense of alienation within the ranks of the working poor. In part, Gaskell's use of the preface expressing a type of moral epiphany, illustrates just how easily the everyday plight of the poor can go unnoticed. This technique aids in allaying any middle-class fears that she is stirring up working-class animosity, animosity that might

lead to further strikes. The preface also expresses a certain social lack within contemporary nineteenth-century England. By outlining this specific social situation Gaskell is attempts to forge a bond between the reader and text in the same way as she is attempting to form a bond between worker and master in the text. It is an *emotional* connection that Gaskell is attempting to create, even if her introductory method is somewhat transparently manipulative, a connection she feels crucial in any attempt to reestablish worker master harmony.

In an attempt to demonstrate a commonality between the feuding sections of English society, Gaskell in many ways reaches back to a common English past to re-establish a link between the peoples of Manchester, echoing to a certain degree the idea that there was an English past when all people of England lived together in harmony. With this as a point of critical departure, that is, that Gaskell is attempting to reestablish interclass communication, the obvious question is "does Gaskell carry off the re-creation of communication," and, how does her ideology reflect on the various classes within the novel? However, the subject of most criticism on *Mary Barton* is focused around questions of verisimilitude and authenticity. In reviews ranging from those printed soon after the debut of the novel to contemporary twenty-first century reviews, Gaskell's portraiture of the lower classes usually receives top billing. The news is almost always positive, critics applauding her construction of working-class life as real and authentic. Criticism of the novel ranges from vitriolic accusations that Gaskell misrepresents[3] the situation of the working poor in an attempt to stir up confrontation between masters and men to comparatively banal questions of her artistic and intellectual abilities. Within *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Critical Heritage* there are numerous

instances where this is born out, sometimes within the same article. In a November 1848 issue of the *Examiner*, John Forrester writes: "Her fault is the occasional use of somewhat commonplace materials of effect, and the handling of questions now and then beyond her reach" (Easson 69). The implication here is that at times Gaskell's aesthetic vision and art are somewhat limited and that she is not well enough informed with regard to her subject matter. However, later in the same article he posits the opposite view stating that "her characters talk naturally and in their native garb of speech" (Easson 69). This suggests that Gaskell has quite ably re-created the character and material surroundings of the working poor. Easson's *Critical Heritage* generally presents a positive reception of Gaskell's first work, often, revolving around her ability and authority to write on her chosen subject. Henry Fothergill Chorley's October 1848 article in *Athenaeum* praises Gaskell's novel, saying:

> ...In yet in another respect *Mary Barton* deserves praise. The author has made use of the Lancashire dialect- a vigorous and racy, but in some districts scarcely intelligible, patois- with ease, spirit and nicety in selection. By all who have paid any attention to kindred subjects- and, as an instance, have compared Sir Walter's Scotch with the Scotch of any northern novelist- this will be accepted as high commendation.
>
> (Easson 63)

While these reviews express radically opposing views regarding the novel, the substance of both is the relationship of author to subject matter. The range of critical response shows

Gaskell's preface as either accurately predicting critical response, or guiding critical reception. The question that persists is the question of authenticity. Critical reception assumed that with a critical blow to the credibility of the author, the essential value of the novel would be lost. As a result, much scholarship, past and present, has dedicated itself to authenticating the presentation of the lower classes within the novel.

One of Gaskell's methods of creating authentic lower-class characters involves a specific literary device. When drawing lower-class characters, Gaskell uses a specific dialect which includes supposedly culturally specific words, words that might be unknown to some nineteenth century middle-class readers; she generously helps her reader by adding a textual gloss to define, contextualize and sometimes present the derivation of the word. That two of the above citations raise the question of language is not accidental. For Gaskell, language is an important tool to help emphasize both class difference and sameness. By using an English dialect that really existed (Lancashire) to construct lower-class identity, and using old or obscure words (the gloss tells the reader that the words used are located in pre 19th century literature), Gaskell potentially loses the emotional connection with the reader through a deluge of odd language. By adding the gloss to define the word Gaskell creates a sense that the reader is more easily included in the action of the text. This inclusivity interpolated into the text via her gloss is of chief importance for Gaskell, as is a seamless connection between reader and text. The establishment of a dialogue between the middle and working-class characters in the novel requires a certain hermeneutic gymnastics that includes a gloss for those who are unfamiliar with lower-class parlance. As the text assumes a reader unfamiliar with certain working-class language, the gloss ostensibly puts the reader in the position of

master. The reader obtains mastery over the text through the extra information contained in the glosses, and is therefore able to understand the exclusive nuance of lower-class language that the masters in the novel are alienated from. The language problem Gaskell assumes in her readership is a microcosm of the larger social problems the novel is trying to address- mainly, the breakdown in communication between the masters and men. The gloss at once illustrates the communication problem between middle and lower classes and represents the lack of understanding between the two classes. In the spirit of authenticity the Lancashire dialect is employed and the gloss is there to make this strange language understandable to her readership. The gloss represents the interclass communication rift and lack of knowledge. The seamlessness communication between the reader and text is the social repair Gaskell asks for and allows the reader.

Alternate titles for *Mary Barton* were *John Barton* and *Masters and Men.* Both of these titles point to social problems that Gaskell wished to address in *Mary Barton.* The *Masters and Men* title reflects the binary class structure, and struggle, that Gaskell wished to address, while *John Barton* expresses the plight of the ordinary working class man. The various plots that weave through the novel encompass John Barton's experience as a lower class working man, subjected to what he sees as the whims of a tyrannous middle class, which in turn illustrate the dispute between masters and men. But the novel also includes a murder mystery plot, romance themes and the possibility of unification and social harmony, and it is, after all, called *Mary Barton.* How then, does the reader place the title *Mary Barton* within these themes and within the greater context of social protest? Feminist scholars have made great hay with *Mary Barton,* arguing that what the Patriarchal literary establishment

saw as a flawed aesthetic is in fact a unique and specifically gendered one. It has also been read, of course, as a social protest novel, and has been received positively and negatively by those speaking for the masters and those speaking for the working class. Gaskell herself states that the impetus to write the novel was to "excite attention at the present time of the struggle on the part of the work people to obtain what they esteem their rights" (*Mary Barton* 15).

Elizabeth Gaskell writes *Mary Barton* after the overt material threat of Chartism is past, but the undercurrent of social unrest that Chartism called to attention was still very present. Chartism's lasting impression on the mercantile middle classes lay in its anti-property ethic. Those affiliated with Chartism were not against all property ownership per se, but objected to the ownership of property they called capital, that is, property that served to create surplus value for the owner. It is easy to see here how any newly monied factory owner might have a personal cause to fear Chartism. The reform act of 1832[4] also left a bad taste in the mouths of the middle class and Chartists alike. Chartists who were vehemently campaigning for political representation argued for universal suffrage, whereas the middle class did not wish to lose their newly won political power. Any adjustment in the property laws threatened to erase any political gain the middle class has recently gained through capital. The threat that the working-classes posed through combinations and strikes was certainly on the minds of the masters, but few seem to locate it in the notion of representation, political or otherwise. This fear created a communicative rift between masters and men that threatened to devolve into revolutionary class struggle, and created the impetus for the novel *Mary Barton*.

Critical reception of *Mary Barton*

In the critical reception of Elizabeth Gaskell, I shall focus primarily on four sources. In *Elizabeth Gaskell: Writers and their Work*, Kate Flint offers an excellent appraisal of relevant critical reception up to the mid 1990's. Catherine Gallagher's landmark *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction 1832-1867*, created a new point of departure for Gaskell criticism, a book to which nearly all criticism since its publication refers. Hilary Schor's *Scheherezade in the Marketplace*, as well as references from *The Gaskell Society Journal*, a largely laudatory periodical, will round out my critical reception of Gaskell.

Much print has been dedicated to Gaskell's attempt to bridge the communicative gap between masters and men. That Gaskell's novel is an interventionist one is rarely disputed. In *Elizabeth Gaskell: Writers and their Work*, Kate Flint finds that Gaskell had a predilection for the protest novel form, arguing that most of her novels were designed to increase social awareness:

> Gaskell's own early fiction, in particular, can be linked to this desire for public representation, since it sets out to give a voice to the otherwise silent whether the mill-worker or the unmarried working-class mother. Both *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* were not just topical, but interventionist in their attempt to arouse understanding and sympathy.
>
> (Flint 5)

Though Flint here expresses Gaskell's desire for public representation, the authenticity of the voice Gaskell gives to the lower-class characters is a question that is never discussed. Flint's

book is a solid overview of Gaskell scholarship, but conspicuously absent is any question regarding linguistic constructions in the novel. Flint's reading of *Mary Barton* focuses on Gaskell's attempt to impress upon the upper classes the need for social responsibility in dealing with the poor. Quoting from Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Flint argues that "Gaskell's concern with responsibility - and her recognition that accepting responsibility may not be easy" (Flint 2) was her chief concern.

Unification responsibility is achieved in Flint's view through the theme of pain and loss:

> Significantly, it is through acknowledging that pain-the pain felt at the loss of a child- can cross class boundaries, that the gap between employer and employee (and, for that matter, between reader and working-class character) is temporarily dissolved within this novel.
>
> (Flint 11)

The dissolution of class boundaries aims at awakening a spirit of compassion and sympathy in the reader, at getting him or her to look forward for others (Flint 14). This experience demonstrates a commonality between all members of society and posits an ulterior structure of power, a heavenly one, designed to increase what Gaskell called sympathy between the people of England.

Flint's discussion of the novel moves on to look at the power relations in the novel, finding that *Mary Barton* underwrites new, domestic sources of power, undermining the patriarchal middle-class. The other plot to *Mary Barton* is the murder mystery plot, where Jem Wilson, a working class character, is accused of the murder of Mr. Carson, the central

master in the novel. Here the hero is one who would typically be seen as a completely disenfranchised person, a lower class woman, Mary Barton. By emphasizing the failure of organized efforts of the working men, yet showing how Mary's determined action results in justice being done in one specific case, Flint argues that Gaskell highlights sources of power apart from those located in industrialized, patriarchal relations between masters and men. Flint presents a domestic source of power which derives from inner qualities rather than from class position. For Flint the novel is as much about a mature and strong woman heroine as it is about the working-class struggles of nineteenth century Manchester.

Here Flint's reading of *Mary Barton* dovetails with Catherine Gallagher's reading. Gallagher claims that Gaskell rejects a unicausal interpretive scheme: *Mary Barton* is a novel where causation is not located in one specific area, but in many. At issue in Gallagher's reading is free will versus social determinism. Gallagher cites that social action, humanitarian intervention, and the nature of human freedom were not considered simple problems:

> Most industrial reformers were torn between the conflicting elements in their own propaganda: on one hand they wished to assert their belief in free will and a benign providence, and on the other to illustrate the helplessness of individuals caught in the industrial system. Similarly, working-class radicals maintained on one hand that workers were enslaved and degraded by industrial capitalism, and on the other that workers were ready for the franchise. The industrial novels could hardly be able to escape these deep

> contradictions that constantly marked both middle-class and working class social criticism.
>
> (Gallagher 34)

By casting a woman as the heroine in *Mary Barton*, Gallagher argues that Gaskell works through the problem of free will, social determinism and enfranchisement. For Gallagher, many of the peripheral characters in the novel lack moral or educative abilities due to their social position. Working class John Barton descends into substance abuse and murder, middle class Carson family unwittingly create the social circumstances that precipitate the murder because of their unwillingness to adequately inform and enfranchise the working class, and upwardly mobile Jem Wilson becomes socially and politically impotent when he is inculpated in Carson's murder. It is only Mary who is able to negotiate the social space of both upper and lower class, and the exterior and interior space of the rough and tumble working-class world.

Gallagher's conclusion is that the "dominant impulse in *Mary Barton* is to escape altogether from causality, to transcend explanation" (Gallagher 67). Looking for the causality of events disrupts social equilibrium. When John Barton investigates the cause of his poverty, he is driven to a murderous rage. When Mary does not investigate the causality of her father's action in murdering Mr. Carson, she is successful in providing an alibi for Jem Wilson without inculpating her father. The communication or unification that Gallagher finds Gaskell advocating leaves the fate of the working classes in the hands of the masters. For Gallagher, Mary Barton's search for a communicative link between the court and Jem Wilson is one that does not concern itself with the causality of the act investigated, but with

communication between people of various classes.

Claiming that *Mary Barton* is partly about the ways in which narrative conventions mask and distort reality (67-8), Gallagher finds Gaskell attempting to undermine certain narratological forms in favor of others. Gallagher argues that Gaskell illustrates prevalent misperception of the poor through Carson's caricaturish drawing of one of the workers. Gallagher uses the Carson affair as an indication that old narrative tropes misrepresent modern English reality, indicating that middle-class understanding of the poor is reliant on comic tropes from canonical writers. A definitive moment for Gallagher is the moment when master Mr. Harry Carson draws a caricature of the lower-class people he is meeting:

> Mr. Harry Carson had taken out his silver pencil, and had drawn an admirable caricature of them- lank, ragged, dispirited, and famine-stricken. Underneath he wrote a hasty quotation of the fat knight's well known speech in Henry IV. He passed it to one of his neighbours, who acknowledged the likeness instantly, and by him it was sent round to the others, who all smiled and nodded their heads.
>
> (*Mary Barton* 235)

The fact that middle-class people instantly recognize it is evidence that the poverty stricken have been fodder for laughs in the past. It is this action that ultimately galvanizes the resolve of the workers to murder.

By dramatizing the fatal consequences of what is for the middle-class master nothing more than a joke, Gaskell demonstrates both the ignorance of the rich, and that this ignorance derives from a historical misrepresentation through literature. By drawing working class

characters that contradict the stereotype, Gallagher finds Gaskell radically undermines prevalent lower class stereotypes. Gallagher makes no claim that Gaskell's representation of the poor is 'authentic,' but argues that undermining social stereotype is a social intervention in itself.

Rosalind Slater in "The Novelist's Use of Dialect" in the *Gaskell Society Journal*, comes to similar conclusions, claiming that dialect a comic device. Slater claims Gaskell undermines this by creating non-comic characters who speak in dialect. Slater's reading of the novel relies heavily on a historical literary context. By looking at previous representations of lower classes in other writers, such as Shakespeare, she is able to suggest a paradigm shift in Gaskell's novel. For Slater it is significant that Carson uses Shakespeare to make fun of lower-class people. It is here that the comic understanding of the lower class resides, and the disastrous misunderstanding of the classes takes place. Carson's caricature of the lower classes is evidence that Gaskell believed that literature was not only influential, but potentially harmful. For Slater, Gaskell is showing that the lower-class characters in her novel, and thereby in the real world, are "worthy human being's and as such should have a voice in their own future" (Slater 89). For this reason Gaskell "provides a voice for the poor by appearing to allow them to tell their own tale" (Slater 89).

Slater's reading of the novel is reminiscent of traditional readings mentioned earlier. Through her vehement representation of the legitimate cause of lower class people, Gaskell demonstrates that the situation of the poor needs to be taken seriously. Slater praises Gaskell's technique, lauding the authenticity of the characters, similar to comments made one hundred and fifty years ago. The contradiction here is that Gaskell apparently accurately

represents the lower classes while allowing them to represent themselves. Slater attempts to get around this problem by stating that "when quoting other people, they have a tendency to take on the accent of the other" (Slater 94). Here Slater acquiesces to inevitable misrepresentation of lower-class life by a middle-class author. Here we have run aground with the apparent impossibility of reading *Mary Barton* as an authentic look at lower-class life. Because a lower-class person did not write the book it cannot be an authentic working class statement. How then is it possible write knowing that the act of representation 'for' excludes authentic representation 'of'? The question should rather be how her presentation highlights the lack of voice of the poor and the history of middle class disregard of the poor. In *Mary Barton*, part of Gaskell's point is that the poor cannot represent themselves in a way that the middle classes accept or understand. For Gallagher and Slater, any representation that establishes a break from the oppressive 'comic' representation of the lower classes found in canonical literature will affect an urge in the real world for the middle class to understand, and to change, the situation of the lower class.

Through Slater and Gallagher we can see that in *Mary Barton*, Gaskell gives not an objective truth, but reasons why the standard objective truth has failed. Gallagher claims that "The real reality for her [Gaskell] does not lie behind human behavior in a set of scientific laws; it is on the very surface of life, and although it is often obscured by conventional modes of perception, it can be adequately represented in common language" (Gallagher 65). It is language then, that holds the key to creating a link between the upper and lower classes. Slater further argues that in *Mary Barton*:

> The workers believe that direct speech in the voice of their fellow

> orator can bring a radical change in the ruling classes, whose sons, as we know from the Carsons, are attuned only to the comic elements in eloquence such as John Barton's.
>
> (Slater 95)

Here we come to the clash of language, and it is here that the pivotal change needs to be made. There is an inerrant disjunction between middle-class speech and working-class speech that has led to more serious social problems. However, we see that non violent expression is still the preferred mode of discourse for the poor. Implicit here is that labor violence is a last resort, an action taken only after a breakdown in linguistic understanding.

Inter community Dialogue: Depictions of class

Historically, it is easy to see what circumstances make a novel like *Mary Barton*, possible: The history of labour struggle, the rise of a new power structure, the industrial revolution calling the masses to the cities, all contribute to a prevalent sense of need for social repair. The influx of people into the cities and the radical changes in class organization brought new methods of understanding the masses, the faceless crowd, and the poor. Concepts such as physiognomies were attempts to bring into focus the unknown social quantity of the city. A new scientific interest in the inner space of the body and experiments with the dead show an ever increasing desire for new knowledge about the human experience[5]. Difficulties in labour restructuring were of keen interest to both working and middle-class people. People of all classes understood the social discord between upper and lower classes. The awful physical evidence of violence, strikes and combinations, were mystifying acts of terrorism to the middle class, who often were unsure to what the lower

classes were responding. So prevalent was the concern that an 1848 issue of *Fraser's Magazine* addresses the problem, claiming the answer to lower-class motivations lay within Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton:*

> People on Turkey carpets, with their three meals a day, are wondering, forsooth, why working men turn Chartists and Communists.
>
> Do they want to know why? Then let them read *Mary Barton*. Do they want to know why poor men, kind and sympathizing as women to each other, learn to hate law and order, Queen, Lords and commons, country-party, and corn law leagues, all alike- to hate the rich in short? Then let them read *Mary Barton*. Do they want to know what can madden brave, honest, industrious North-Country hearts, into self imposed suicidal strikes, into conspiracy, vitriol-throwing, and midnight murder? Then let them read *Mary Barton*.
>
> (*Mary Barton* 15-16)'

The article presents both Gaskell's power to incite emotion from her readership and the realism that critics feel Gaskell carries off so well. The article acknowledges that the poor are binding together in opposition to the wealthy, but that their motive is not wrought out of mean spiritedness but out of despair and perceived oppression. The article suggests that combinations and strikes are a relatively new thing, and that the wealthy are unable to understand why they occur. In emphasizing the ignorance of the ruling-class to the detriment of the lower, civil unrest is an inevitability. What is most important in the article is its emphasis on the emotional expression of the poor in *Mary Barton.* It is quite reasonable to

ask why 'brave, honest and industrious' people become enemies of the state. The middle class had no framework for understanding civil disobedience as a method of social activism. *Mary Barton* is the vehicle to create a context for the middle class to understand the motivation of working class activism. According to *Fraser's Magazine, Mary Barton's* accomplishments are significant: it accurately represents a lower-class reaction to the lack of political representation, a people whose social voice was at best unrecognized or at worse ignored.

As the last chapter has presented, there were many thoughts on how to attack the problem of poverty in England. To aid in the transition of the working class from an unrepresented, unfamiliar 'other' to a represented entity, Gaskell uses several tricks with language which serve not only to help her to create compelling characters, but to illustrate wider issues of social breakdown, repair and cohesion. Language in *Mary Barton* works uniquely to represent notions of individual and class difference as well as sameness. The desire to 'know' the lower classes, and the problems that effect the whole of the population, is no new turn for ruling ideology. Conventional wisdom believed that the problems of the lower classes had a habit of bleeding into the middle/upper classes, so, in a self interested way, problems of the poor were the problems of the middle class. I will argue that the problem is that middle-class ways of knowing/understanding the working classes are insufficient, and Gaskell proposes a method of suturing what is essentially a communicative gap between the ruling and working classes. Her method outlines a sense of community within language that is at once in-dissolvable, different but connected to a sense of sameness. Gaskell presents all classes as simultaneously autonomous and dependant- "the employers

and the employed must rise and fall together"(*Mary Barton* 221) as the mantra of her novel- and the push to create a communicative connection between the classes as the method of social survival.

By framing a large portion of *Mary Barton* with a murder mystery plot, Gaskell represents the real potential of lower-class violence perpetuated against the middle-class master. This real representation powerfully illustrates the intensity of the social conflict, but the act itself does not show the constitutive conditions that give rise to this radical method of social action. I will argue that Gaskell sees the problem between the masters and workers as essentially a communicative one. The polarization of this communicative breakdown sets the stage for masterly misrecognition of social realities, which in turn give rise to radical, and sometimes violent, responses of the working class. Focussing on language as an integral method of understanding both the social problem Gaskell presents in the novel and class division, I will endeavour to illustrate how Gaskell's linguistic emphasis allows her to suggest that proper communication is the key to representing, understanding and solving social problems.

Construction of the lower class

As Gaskell sets out to realistically portray the lower classes, she uses an 'extra textual' device that at once draws attention to the character drawn and to the device itself. With certain examples of dialogue, Gaskell uses words (such as "nesh", "ferrantly", "frabbet") then includes at the foot of the page a definition and, at times, a larger context such as the word's derivation in literature. That the reader is given a gloss for some of the words in the book illustrates the position of the upper-class reader in relation to the lower-

class character. In *Mary Barton,* Gaskell performs the useful task of intermediary, or hinge, demonstrating the speech patterns of lower-class people in a way that the upper-class readership can understand. Gaskell's hope is that with the aid of the glosses the upper-middle-class reader should have no trouble understanding the plight of the poor and their position within the greater context. It is however, the description of the speech patterns of the lower classes that simultaneously reinscribes the class system and the social divisions in place previous to the writing of the novel.

Gaskell's narrative aid is located chiefly within the first one hundred and fifty pages of the novel where Gaskell presents the social and material situation of the working class. It is used by only working-class characters, and then only when in conversation with another person of similar class station. There is no situation in the novel where middle-class language is glossed. If a middle-class character is even present within a certain scene the gloss is absent. The inclusion of the gloss as a narrative aid assumes an unfamiliarity or oddness of a certain type of communication, and we can see that it is a linguistic aid to a certain type of reader. The question begs, why is only one class of characters's language glossed, and how does this characterize the speech of that type of person? One perfunctory conclusion would be to see that there are two clearly defined linguistic communities within the novel. One that speaks with the gloss, and one that is without. However, the fact that the reader is privy to something that the middle-class character is not, and the fact that the gloss disappears when any middle-class person is present, can also suggest a interpretive problem for the middle-class character that Gaskell is attempting to draw attention to. If the cause of social upheaval is in fact a communicative one, it is possible to assume that one side

is at fault, that one group is either unable or unwilling to use discourse to solve social problems. As lower-class language is glossed, and the only overt act of violence is perpetuated by the working class, a perfunctory conclusion is that the problem of mutual communication is located in lower-class speech. This conclusion would bear out the majority middle-class view that the lower classes are innately disruptive and unruly; that there is something to the path to success being innate. However this conclusion is not born out in the novel, and it does not take into consideration the social circumstances that lead to any violent act in much the same way that the middle classes liked to overlook various extenuating social/material conditions that contributed to amassing great wealth and power. Working within the assumption that the communicative rift between the classes is 'ground zero' of class animosity, discoveries need to be made as to how the gloss impacts the reader, how it functions to highlight a communicative divide and where communication problems lie.

Gaskell resists attributing the lack of social stability to any particular class linguistically. In any communicative process there are two participants, a sender of a message and a receiver. Gaskell shows the breakdown in communication between the rich and poor as one side oblivious to the others 'reality'. The problem is presented as a hermeneutical one; a problem where communication between classes is not successfully completed. This hermeneutical problem illustrates one of two (or both) possible scenarios: either the sender of the message is some sort of linguistic cripple, or, the receiver garbles the message received. Once again we reach the impasse of a binary location of responsibility- that the lower classes cannot speak their reality, or the middle classes cannot or will not hear it. The first step in looking at Gaskell's attempt to suture the hermeneutical gap between the

middle and lower classes is to investigate inter- and extra-communal interaction. Inter-communal interaction is communication between socially and linguistically equivalent beings. Extra-communal communication is cross class communication. Looking at the former linguistic community, the working class, we find that there is no communicative problems within the community itself- it is only when communicating with the upper classes that there is a breakdown, an observation that should allay any conclusions that the lower classes are unruly or innately violent and linguistically inept. Four pages into the novel we get a sample of the speech acts of two of the main characters, which displays the ability that lower-class people have to understand their own peculiar brand of English:

> 'Come, women,' said John Barton, 'you've both walked far enough. My Mary expects to have her bed in three weeks; and as for you, Mrs. Wilson, you know you're but a cranky sort of a body at the best of times.' This was said so kindly, that no offense could be taken. 'Sit down here; the grass is well nigh dry by this time; and you're neither of you nesh* folk about taking cold.
>
> *Nesh; Anglo-Saxon, nesc, tender
>
> (*Mary Barton* 42)

Here Gaskell seemingly presents a scene of old friends, treating each other with practised familiarity. But the gloss on the word 'nesh' brings up many questions regarding the language use of these characters. The use of the word nesh does not disrupt the flow of conversation in the novel, that is, the characters listening to John Barton understand the meaning of the word, demonstrating that the conversants share the same lexicon of language. In *The Fundamentals of Language*, Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle state that "the

efficacy of a speech event demands the use of a common code by its participants" (Jakobson 58). The 'speaker' and the 'spoken to' must select from what Halle and Jakobson call "preconceived possibilities" (Jakobson 58), various words and analogous meanings, to make sense of a verbal message. Thus "[t]he addresser of a verbal message selects one of these 'preconceived possibilities' and the addressee is supposed to make an identical choice from the same assembly of 'possibilities already seen and provided for'" (Jakobson 58). The reader knows this has happened for Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Barton because neither party misconstrues the message, and we are thus without Mrs. Wilson asking for a definition of the word nesh.

As the gloss signals here a sense of inclusion with a certain community, the reader may find this example of speech somewhat confusing. Whether the reader encounters the words on the page as strange or not, the gloss precedes them with the expectation of strangeness. The text in a sense constructs the unfamiliarity of the word nesh, and therefore provides the reader with an explanation of what it means. The narrator guides the reader through what is anticipated to be an unfamiliar setting and verbal transaction, presents a definition of the word thereby acting as an interpretive tool for the reader to understand the literal meaning of the spoken message. That is, Gaskell presents a literal translation of the word nesh, telling the reader it means tender. The construction of community is, in part, a linguistic community where the people in the conversation share a common lexicon for linguistic communication.

Though this passage is significant for what the gloss literally signals to the reader, a translation of the word nesh, what it says implicitly is also important: that the two characters

are utilising a similar lexicon to successfully complete the communication and that there is a tacit understanding that exists between the two characters. Here, Mrs. Wilson understands John Barton's intention not only because of what he says but because of how he says it. By calling Mrs. Wilson a 'cranky sort of body', it is reasonable for the reader to assume that the language used could easily offend. In fact, a literal translation of the passage would lead the reader to this assumption. As a narrative aid, the gloss helps to provide the reader with a literal translation of the passage, but the narrator then subtly undermines this aid by telling the reader that within this context, words used may have a different meaning from the literal translation. The communicants in this passage know instinctively not to take offense, but the narrator must point this out to the reader who is assumed unable to comprehend this sort of convivial felicity and tacit understanding. Again, Jakobson and Halle allow us to penetrate beneath the face value of the characters words, and explain why the characters themselves also do so:

> In any language, there exist also coded word-groups called phrase-words. The meaning of the idiom *how do you do* cannot be derived by adding together the meanings of its lexical constituents; the whole is not the sum of its parts . . . In order to comprehend the overwhelming majority of word-groups, we must be familiar only with the constituent words and with the syntactical rules for their combination. Within these limitations we are free to set words in new contexts.
>
> (Jakobson, Halle 59, italics theirs)

Though Jakobson and Halle are talking about language on a grand scale, the intimacy

between John Barton and Mrs. Wilson and their shared discursivity permits a similar application. The fact is that only the characters in the book share familiar rules of syntax on this occasion. The phrase iterated does not dissolve into the sum of its parts, and is not within the boundaries of irony. The characters tacitly understand the intent of the speaker without any extra explanation, yet Gaskell believes that the reader needs help to reach the same level of understanding that the characters share.

The creation of two radically different discursive communities will certainly present a problem in the reception of the novel. That these characters have a way to connote meaning to each other, that does not translate to the upper classes, illustrates that there is a level of understanding between lower-class people that can at times supercede language. The existence of the gloss signals the invocation of a specific linguistic community, but there is an additional emotional bond that cannot, or is not, represented linguistically. The gloss as a narrative aid is limited in its scope because it presents a literal translation which may be insufficient to decode the message. What it does express is that people whose language is glossed are able to elucidate clearly an emotionally charged message that is easily understood and affects the desired response within a certain community. This hermeneutic, this way of communicating that allows comprehension despite literal translations that might arrive at opposite conclusions, banishes any conclusion that the lower classes are somehow linguistically incompetent within their own community. We see a specifically close relationship allows the characters in this scene to communicate in what is a highly nuanced language, one where certain words may be unfamiliar to certain readers, but is completely understandable to the characters involved.

Apart from the measure of the gloss as a lexical narrative aid -giving a literal insight into the communicative relationships of a certain type of character- there is a specific location of the gloss in relation to class which effects the reception of certain characters. As only the working classes use language that is glossed, the reader associates the gloss not only with the working class but with poverty. Because foreignness of certain words is an authorial assumption, and the fact that it is employed only within lower-class speech, J.L. Austin would categorize the cumulative effect of the gloss as a type of performative. In *How To Do Things With Words* Austin describes a performative speech act as speech that calls into being the act/ thing spoken. Just as a person says 'I Do' at a marriage ceremony, the act of speaking is the act that calls into being the condition of marriage. There is no other act necessary to execute the reality of the situation other than the speech act. Similarly, someone saying 'I bet' instantly bets, as Austin says: "The uttering of the word is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act (of betting or whatnot), the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the *sole* thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed "(Austin 8 Italics his). Austin goes on to state that the speaker, message and receiver must be appropriate in some context that allows for further action, even if it is the uttering of other words. The christener of a ship must have some authority, and the taker of a bet must be a reliable person for a person to make a bet in the first place. In the conversation between Mr. Barton and Mrs. Wilson, each is familiar with the rules of their common discursivity and share a common lexicon which allows them to understand each other. Their emotional connection, the context of working class, allows them to communicate in a space transcendent from the rules of

literal speech. The appropriateness of the speaker here is important, in that it identifies how Mrs. Wilson is able to 'see through' the literal meaning of John Barton's words to his intended meaning.

For the reader, the mere existence of the gloss calls into being a certain type of recognizable character and situation. It presents a certain type of character as distinct and recognisable, but with a means of communication that are outside the expected expertise of the reader. The reader can see that there is no communicative deficiency within the lower classes, and that the gloss signals the ability of the lower classes to perform themselves to each other. The language used holds meaning for each of the characters involved in dialogue, and performs a mutual recognition of sameness. The invocation of the word to the reader presents two lower-class characters in conversation with each other, and shows that they recognise themselves as linguistically the same. The gloss works here to present a sense of sameness with the reader as well by constructing a sense of familiarity and community between reader and character/text. Not only is language used as an aid in drawing a certain type of character (a working-class character), but by signalling this community the gloss also allows the reader access to a community which might otherwise be closed. Because the reader is able to understand the dialogue, there is a seamlessness for the reader, that is, there is no difficulty with the language because of the gloss. This invokes a measure of sameness between the reader and the characters in a way the dialogue without the gloss would not. If Gaskell has used the word 'frabbit' without the gloss, and the reader was unfamiliar with the word, it would immediately draw attention to the foreignness of the word and possibly leave the reader without an understanding of what the lower classes are saying. The gloss by itself

however, does not alleviate the sense of foreignness in the language. The gloss sticks out and presents the reader with the understanding that something different, unknown is happening on the page. The gloss and the language of the lower class illustrates a sense of both sameness and difference; sameness within a certain class structure, and difference with the dominant language of the middle class. Gaskell here allows the working class to retain their culture and selfness but move towards understanding with the middle class.

Gaskell attempts to alleviate this distance by giving extra context for the glossed words she uses. With many of the words glossed Gaskell presents the reader with its derivation in canonical English literature. With the word nesh, Gaskell tells us that it is in fact an antiquated Anglo Saxon form of the word nesc, which in turn means tender. Later when Gaskell uses the word 'Sin' and 'clem', she tells the reader that these words come from the poetry of Chaucer and Ben Jonson respectively. The assertion that the language derives from the same language that the middle class uses is an effective way to present the lower classes as deriving from the same stock as the middle classes. They are all, the gloss implies, people of England. Gaskell's attempt here is to present the lower classes as recognizable, as the same, to connect emotionally the reader with working-class characters and their situation. They are much like the middle class, but the subtle change in their language shows that there is a communicative problem between classes.

The hermeneutic between reader and text, and the reader's encounter with the glosses, effaces the subtlety of communication that exists between the lower-class people. The language is laid bare, and we are given insight into their exclusive discursivity. Language that would generally be a roadblock to comprehension is instead an insight into the

communicative practices of the lower classes. By presenting a material reality, Gaskell brings us to a social and linguistic reality as well: that the lower classes are apart from the understanding of the middle class. The gloss Gaskell inserts at the foot of the page defines the word for the reader (*Nesh=tender), and tells of its Anglo Saxon origin. The need for a gloss creates distance between the reader and the character speaking, as the word makes language 'strange,' and is thereby equivalent to the use of a foreign language and presentation of a foreign character. However, they are both using the same language and it is primarily a lexical impediment rather than a linguistic one. For the reader, Jakobson and Halle's 'preconceived possibilities' within the text itself are not satisfied between text and reader, thus the use of a gloss. The failure of a complete lexicon within the mind of the reader, requires the author to exert an artificial control over the communicative process; without it we can assume the language would go by misunderstood. The gloss becomes a signifier of class to the reader and relegates the lower class characters to a linguistic sub-class, while at the same time legitimating a foreign mode of discourse expanding the communicative horizon of the middle class. That the language is in fact English, and not Spanish or Japanese, shows that their mode of discourse derives from the same place as the reader and presents a commonality, but also marks them as other, as the reader needs an interpretive aid to understand the dialogue of the lower classes.

The gloss here presents the difference and sameness of the lower class. The middle classes are like the lower class, they use a form of English just as the middle class does, but it retains a difference of dialect. The effects of this at once preserve a sense of autonomous identity of the lower classes, while allowing them to be a part of a larger picture of

Englishness. However, the fact that Gaskell uses old English to categorize the lower classes has implications within the wider context of progress within the industrial revolution. The bondage of the glosses to the lower classes can be read as relegating a specific class of character to a backward state, shackling them within a specific discursivity. The social implication being that the lower classes are unable to progress linguistically at the same rate as the middle classes. We can see here a comparison between material and linguistic attributes. The same innate constitutive lack- a lack of ingenuity, creativity etc.- that withholds material middle-class status to the working class is reflected in the progression, or lack thereof, of language. The location of the gloss on lower class speech allows the reader to recognize a lower class character in a way that it cannot locate the middle. The gloss and context locate the dialect in a distant past, whereas the language of the middle class has the illusion of transparency. There is no way to derive the culture or class of a character whose speech is not glossed. The language does not retain any context that allows the reader to even arrive at a conclusion of Englishness. A new character could hypothetically be introduced from another country and, if there was not gloss present, would be indistinguishable from the English middle class. Within the context of the industrial revolution, progress was a highly desirable commodity. The vast increase in wealth in nineteenth century England was largely due to the progressive urge of capitalism. Within this context the working class seem to have been left behind.

Returning to J.L. Austin's work *How To Do Things With Words*, we can posit further how the language of the middle classes and the glossed language of the working classes affects the reader. Austin divides individual speech acts (phonetic acts) into two categories,

phatic and rhetic:

> The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noises. The phatic act is the uttering of certain vocables or words, i.e., noises of certain types, belonging to and as belonging to, a certain vocabulary, conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar. The rhetic act is a performance of using those vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference.
>
> (Austin 95)

For the characters who share a common discursivity, the use of the word nesh or clem, refers to their social class. The reader should recognize that the character is using a common grammar, but the reference of the word is lost. Austin says that "The pheme is a unit of *language*: its typical fault is to be nonsense--meaningless. But the rheme is a unit of *speech*; its typical fault is to be vague or void or obscure, &C." (Austin 98). For Austin, a word on its own signifies nothing, or is at best vague. By giving the reader extra textual glosses and context, Gaskell gives the reader insight into the situation of the poor in terms that are not vague. She does in fact, explain the plight of the poor better than the poor themselves could do it. The very existence of a gloss presents an assumption that the lower classes are working within a preferred mode of discourse that the middle classes do not understand. If the working-classes expressed themselves to the middle class in their preferred mode of speech (something that never happens) the message would not be understood, precisely because the middle-class character is without the readers interpretive aid.

From our understanding of the language difference of the upper and lower classes, can we read into *Mary Barton* an urge to assert the primacy of a language or class? Is

Gaskell urging the lower classes to move to middle class English to accomplish their political and social goals? And, if so, is there indeed a move towards the amalgamation of class? The situational use of the gloss presents an issue in the reception of the novel. It is not peculiar that Gaskell uses the gloss only in lower-class characters speech, and only when they are speaking to each other. The existence of the gloss suggests that lower-class speech is a language apart from the 'ordinary' language of the middle class. The gloss allows the middle-class reader access to a discursivity that they are normally absent from and could not understand if they experienced it. This action in some ways reduces the otherness of the lower-class person to the 'same'. With the gloss used to adjust lower class speech only, a cursory conclusion is that there is something strange, or non universal, in lower class speech patterns-that middle class speech has. The average reader then will need an aid to regularize the strangeness of the Lancashire dialect. This seems to reduce the working class to the same as the middle class. Also, universality of middle-class speech is attained by authorial assumption and narrative aid. There is no assumption by the author that the lower-class reader will not understand nuances of upper class speech, and critical evidence tells us that the lower classes widely read *Mary Barton*. In fact there is the reverse; Gaskell assumes that middle-class speech is inherently understood by all. Evidence of this assumption would lie in a narrative aid directed toward the lower-class reader, a gloss for certain upper-class words, an aid which is, of course, absent. It is assumed by the author that every reader will equally understand the language of the middle class. As we shall see, the assumption of universality is not present in Gaskell's work and the difficulty of the gloss as an attempt to reduce the other to the same in fact achieves the opposite effect.

The Language of Philanthropy: *Mary Barton's* Humanitarian Ethic

> Despite all the competing systems of communication available to us, we must recognize the overriding importance of language. It is probably the major transmitter of culture, allowing us to share and pass on our complex configuration of attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of behavior.
>
> (Gerard Genette, "Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method", 182)

The above quotation from Gerard Genette hits home to the modern 'global citizen'. The explosion of various technological methods of communication have created an environment where the primacy of language has receded into the subconscious. We use language to present sports scores, recap the market, send emails to friends- all the time wishing to present an idea rather than draw attention to the way the idea is presented. Language, though it is the primary transmitter of culture, according to Genette, is only a vehicle for information rather than an artistic presentation unto itself. Any dalliance of an author to draw attention to the art of words, it would seem, Genette has no time for: language is there to represent ideas, not to become an idea in itself. Just as today's conventional Hollywood movies present their stories through an omniscient point of view that is not to be questioned by the viewer, so too did the realist novel attempt to tell a story that adhered to the lived experience of the people. The novel as presentation did not draw attention to the substance of its artifice, a good book used language that, as Hawthorn said, faded instantly into memory. Elizabeth Gaskell, though steeped in tradition and often seen in allegiance to the narrative principles stated above, writes *Mary Barton* in a way that in fact accomplishes

something of the opposite effect. The language employed in *Mary Barton* is at times accompanied by a linguistic gloss that at once presents a sense of authenticity of the character being read while bringing attention to the fact that what is read is in fact fiction. This drawing attention to the artifice of reading is not unlike the jiggling of the camera lens in pseudo post modern television programs like *The David Letterman Show*. With an effect that is so obviously intrusive, the question arises of just what Elizabeth Gaskell was asserting with her linguistic gloss. In earlier chapters we have discussed Gaskell's alternate titles, the genre of 'Protest' novel to which this novel is so often aligned, as well as historical conditions that left a certain segment of the British population unrepresented both socially and politically. With all of these assertions, little attention has been payed to the effect of the gloss as a philanthropic device.

Though it is difficult at the best of times to suggest what an author is attempting to achieve, we can safely take it as a tacit truth that Gaskell is writing a novel that is intended to be understood as a form of social protest. When picking up a social protest novel, we as contemporary readers have generated a well conditioned set of expectations. With *Mary Barton*, the groundwork has been set both critically and historically. The novel arrives in 1848 only eight years after the turbulent Chartist movement. The fact that the hangover of Chartism still lingered, and that it was seen as a working class-failure was inspiration for *Mary Barton*, and added fuel to its reception. In the preface, Gaskell outlines her purpose in writing *Mary Barton*. She admits to embarking on another work of fiction only to abandon it in favor of a novel that, for her, addresses more pressing social concerns. Finding that the work people across the land were "sore and irritable against the rich...especially against the

masters whose fortunes they had helped to build up" (*Mary Barton* 37), Gaskell sets out to cool the animosity she sees brewing between the working and ruling classes. The conflict between masters and men had become violent in the past, a consistent threat in the minds of Victorian Englanders. Obviously Gaskell feels that the situation is dire enough to require a mediator, suggesting that there is either neglect on the part of the masters as to the situation of the poor, or that the lower classes are unable to adequately express the problems that drive them to violence. She expresses to her publisher that her goal is to "excite attention at the present time of the struggle on the part of the work people to obtain what they esteem their rights." (*Mary Barton 15*) This comment reinforces the idea that there is a lack of understanding on either side of the equation as to the seriousness of the situation. Gaskell here wishes to excite attention to the *struggle* of the working-class in particular, but does not explicitly say whether they are justified in their animosity. Before a solution can be reached, the lines of communication must be opened and the situation needs to be expressed adequately in a language that all can understand.

The death of Mr. Carson is the key element for many critics as the hermeneutical glue that allows for understanding from both the upper and lower classes. Though the subject of language is often taken up, (for instance, Rosalind Slater uses the above epigram), it is most often seen as a adjunct of Gaskell's method of/for authentication. The subject of the gloss is seen as nothing more than a readers' aid, allowing for the prose to be easily understood by those who would not be familiar with the lower-class means of expression. The questions that are left out include: what effect the language use in *Mary Barton* has on the reader, what is the effect of the glossed language of the lower class, how is it working in the novel, is it

consistent? The aim of the final portion of this paper will investigate Gaskell's use of the gloss, and demonstrate how her method often matches the social and political reality of her day. That is, how the gloss works to materially and metaphysically generate a literary epistemology that demonstrates class difference and class impotence, while at the same time creating a sense of irreducible difference of identity.

A novel is essentially a *linguistic* means of communication. Though most writers, including Elizabeth Gaskell, believe that literature can create a material social change, the book itself affects this through linguistic influence. The primary question I will investigate in the portion of this paper is how the language of *Mary Barton,* specifically Gaskell's use of the gloss, works as social intervention. What does the language of *Mary Barton* achieve? Is there a genuine transmission of culture in the language of the novel, or is it a method of 'othering' a certain class of person.

Subversive Ideology

In any novel there is a need for the subject matter to be adequately received by the novelist's expected readership. We can, I hope, agree that Gaskell is directing her novel toward the upper/middle-class master. Gaskell's above quotation (*Mary Barton,* 15) illustrates that there is a reality of/to the lower classes that the upper classes are ignorant of, for whatever reason. There is also a feeling that lower-class people are unable to make their objections known themselves. Communication between characters is at issue in any novel, but in *Mary Barton,* communication between classes is of the utmost importance. Throughout various examples of linguistic communication within the novel, I will present the aporia between the upper classes and the lower as reflected in language. It is here that

Gaskell's plea on behalf of the lower-class person at times subtly reinscribes the class system, and the status quo. There is without question a distinctness of language between upper and lower-class characters, but we have also seen that working-class characters have no difficulty speaking to one another. Looking back to the binary structure referred to earlier, the cause of the communicative rift as located in either reception or presentation, a look into the speech habits of the middle class to reveal how the middle class communicate, understand themselves and the working class should bring us closer to the root of the problem. We have already seen that middle-class speech is wholly without the gloss. A sample of speech from the Carson's, the most prominent middle-class figure in the novel, shows that the middle classes communicate within their own community with the same felicity as the working class.

In a breakfast scene in the Carson household Gaskell presents again the sense of sameness and difference, this time in the speech habits of the middle class. As Mr. Carson speaks to his daughter, we get a middle-class re-enactment of the closeness affected between John Barton and Mrs Wilson through speech within a middle-class context. When Carson's daughter asks him if he remembered a rose he was supposed to get for her he replies : "No Amy, I did not forget. I asked him and he has got the rose, *sans reproche*; but do you know, little miss extravagance, a very small one is worth half a guinea?" (*Mary Barton* 108). Here is an example of the patriarch of both the household and the factory speaking to his daughter in a highly nuanced language. Once again there is an implicit message that undermines a literal translation of the words on the page. Amy is easily able to understand his use of language and responds instantly, but her response could be confusing: "Oh, I don't mind.

Papa will give it to me, won't you, dear father? He knows his little daughter can't live without flowers and scents."(*Mary Barton* 108). Mr. Carson is here depicted as a kind old man, one who has the complete confidence of those under his care, willing to give audience to the indulgences of those around him. His daughter is also confident that her father will acquiesce to her desires. This scene establishes an explicit mutual understanding of speech, as well as an implicit understanding that goes beyond language. Because Gaskell acknowledges Mr Carson's use of a foreign language with nothing more than italics, she makes a diacritical assumption of her readership and the linguistic sophistication of middle-class people. The gesture here is that it is normal for a little girl from the middle classes to understand French and reasonable to expect the bulk of her readership will also understand it.

Amy seems to interpret her father's statement as though she understands the expense of the rose, though obviously she does not. Her response that she "doesn't mind" the expense of the rose literally, assumes she takes into account the cost in relation to her own wealth. The playful label attached to Amy by her father signals his understanding of her 'needs' and his absolute authority to adjudicate the definition of value. Mr. Carson is fully aware of his position that requires him to understand the significance of Amy's request and assume responsibility for defining the value of the purchase. Amy's response to her father calling her 'little miss extravagance' shows that she does not take offence; she was addressed in the same way that John Barton calling Mrs Wilson a 'cranky sort of body' does not offend. Amy's response expresses her complete faith in her father to provide, and expresses a tacit understanding between the two. For Amy, there is a very specific sense of the value of money

and extravagance, one that is exclusive to her personal experience. Amy's concept of extravagance is located within the context of her father's wealth and her faith in his ability to provide for her needs. He in turn assesses the value of the rose in emotional currency rather than any concept of material need. The rose is not a staple, food or shelter, but is a pleasure he can afford his child- in this way we see a response based on emotional capital rather than political or economic capital. The two classes, middle and working, are able to communicate within their own class with ease and felicity. Both able to rise above the rigid mechanical guidelines of grammar, to a more emotional means of expression.

Mr. Carson initially tries to "refuse his darling," but she is able to convince him that the need for a flower is really one of life's necessities. Amy, a girl of 12, knows just how far she is able to push her father to get what she wants. She has the knowledge of a child, and certainly needs the guardianship of her parents, but is able to coerce her father into buying her petty indulgences. Comparing the two communications, we can see that the responses as well as the questions are class specific. Inter-communal interaction in both the middle-class and working-class dialogue works because Jakobson's preconceived possibilities have been met. Each has a way of communicating and understanding each other because of a shared familiarity with a certain type of language and a facility within it. However, after looking at these two scenes, one wonders whether the words would signify similarly if John Barton switched places with Mr. Carson. How would Mrs. Wilson take to being called extravagant? How would John Barton respond if his daughter asked him to buy her a rose? Of course, there is no way to definitively answer this question, but one can surmise a dramatically different response from both. We see that communication is related to class, that

Amy's 'need' for a rose would look absurd coming from a working class-character like Mary, and, that class privilege is defined by Mr. Carson and its cite is the domestic middle-class home.

Also shown in this scene is the value of proximity. Mr Carson as father knows his little girl as well as possible. He knows Amy's comment is related directly to the father daughter relationship. Gaskell shows that the father is keeping his 'paternal' obligations; that is, we can see that he is not neglecting his daughter, and cares for her emotional as well as her physical well-being. Within the context of the message, we can also see that notions of 'extravagance' are his to define, and his to allocate. He is reproducing class privilege in part because of his understanding of the value of the rose to his daughter and the value of his daughter to him, and also because he can. By creating a familial scenario of the middle classes, Gaskell shows how a master 'can' act within a close relationship. Both linguistically and materially, Mr Carson comes off generously. He is able to understand the communication of his daughter within the context of his affection for her and responds to her request by first giving her his concern regarding the expense of the rose, and, ultimately, giving it to her.

That Mr Carson acts in a way *he* feels appropriate, and the context in which he makes his decision, is important in understanding the communication across class boundaries. As we have seen, John Barton is able to converse at a complex level within the boundaries of his own class, but there seems at times to be a lack of erudition on the part of working-class people when speaking to the middle class. Once again it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that the lower classes are unable to express themselves to the middle classes. Though the lower classes certainly have a distinct method of communication, this method

is out of the context of the middle classes and as a result, the message is often lost or misconstrued in conversation with the upper classes. Gaskell early on presents this communicative impasse, as well as the lack of representation of the poor to the middle classes, their inability to make themselves heard, and their frustration with their predicament. One of the central characters in the novel, John Barton, expresses his frustration in dealing with the masters to his fellow workers in a voice typical of lower class speech habits:

> "Well, but what's not a' your story man. Tell us what happened when yo got to th' Parliament House."
>
> After a little pause John answered,
>
> "If yo please, neighbour, I'd rather say nought about that. It's not to be forgotten or forgiven either by me or many another; but I canna tell of our downcasting just as a piece of London news. As long as I live, our rejection that day will bide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll speak of it no more."

(*Mary Barton* 144-45)

The speech here represented tells a tale in itself. By affecting a specific type of speech act with the language of John Barton, Gaskell emphasizes the strangeness of the language purposely to assault middle-class notions of proper speech. Words like downcasting, bide, canna, and the clipped articles th' and a', instantly assault the readers sense of proper language and set aside the speaker as someone 'other to' the middle class through speech performativity. The modern reader is aware of the oddness of the language, that it is

purposefully language made strange to accentuate a certain type of characterization, if not because it is odd in comparison to their own speech, then through the fact that it is dramatically different from that of the dominant middle-class language represented in the novel. Within this passage, John Barton intentionally omits the details of his encounter but emotionally relays how he, and by extension the whole of the working poor, was rejected. John Barton explicitly does *not* say what happened to him, and this lack of explanation seems to be enough for the people he is speaking to. His strange 'pidgin' English accomplishes the same thing as Amy's perfect English does. It emotionally expresses a reality that the literality of the message could not. What we do know is that his attempt at self representation with the middle class failed, that, in this example, he was an ineffective communicator with/to the middle class.

By omitting the details of the event, Gaskell acknowledges the working-class lack of representation on their own terms. That the march John Barton talks about here was in fact a historical reality that most everyone of the time would have known about illustrates Gaskell's emphasis away from the historical reality of the event to the emotional reality. When John Barton expresses his unwillingness to present the event 'as a piece of London news', the way the bulk of the middle class would have received it, we see that the emotional reality of the lower classes has never been expressed. We get here on a grand scale the crux of the communicative problem that Gaskell sees working between the middle and working classes. The lower classes are not being recognized on their own terms. The representation of the event as a piece of London news is a presentation with a middle-class bias. Without understanding the working-class context for their actions, every act of civil disobedience is,

to the middle class mind, incomprehensible and criminal. The papers would not be able to understand the nuances of the event from a working-class point of view, and would dissolve the difference of the working class by presenting the event within the context of the middle-class ideology. This scene works to relay the stark reality of the lack of representation for the working poor by the working poor, showing working class political impotence; that is, the workers march was not successful in bringing to light the concerns of the poor to the middle class. Gaskell goes so far as to present their lack of representation as unrepresentable. There is no speech here of what the terms were on either side, but simply an expression of rejection and anger. Gaskell's method here cunningly mirrors her subject matter as she tells us that working-class attempts at political representation are viewed from a different vantage point, that they are unheard by the middle class. The tools that the lower class use to represent themselves do not achieve the desired effect. The middle-class perception of working-class attempts at representation are viewed as seditious and criminal or not considered at all. It is clear that for whatever reason the working poor feel/know that they have not been heard, or even been given the chance to tell their story. This is symptomatic of the larger problem of working-class violence. The hermeneutical problem that entails the unwillingness or inability of the middle class to recognize the working class on their own terms has led to the political and social disruption that caused the march on London and, as we see later in the novel, can lead to violence.

The Hermeneutical Problem

The problem Gaskell foresaw in the middle-class reception of the novel is solved by the gloss, a luxury the characters in the novel are without. As the novel has often been

received as a realistic portrayal of the class struggle of nineteenth century England, it is not surprising that the novel is rife with communication problems between the upper and lower-classes. Gaskell highlights this problem the first time members of different class meet each other in the novel. We have seen the utter failure of the working-classes to themselves draw attention to their situation (the march on London) but this attempt was a political move to self representation. As mentioned, Gaskell is drawing attention to the emotional aspect of working-class existence, something the London papers and political representatives have failed to do or to even see. Looking closer at examples of cross class relationships and communication within the novel demonstrates Gaskell's emphasis on the value of communication and understanding at the local level rather than the political. That is, Gaskell presents the problem as one that needs to be solved at the local level, within the factories before any political change can take place. Taking up where we left off, with Amy and Mr Carson at the breakfast table, Gaskell puts a working-class character, Mr Wilson, in the lap of luxury: A middle-class domestic scene. Mr Wilson, an employee in Mr Carson's factory, is visiting his employer to request a medical help for another employee's illness and waits in the kitchen:

> The cook broiled steaks, and the kitchen-maid toasted bread, and boiled eggs.
>
> The coffee steamed upon the fire, and altogether the odours were so mixed and appetizing, that Wilson began to yearn for food to break his fast, which had lasted since dinner the day before. If the servants had known this, they would have willingly given him meat and bread in abundance; but they were like the rest of us, and not feeling any hunger themselves, *forgot* it was possible another might.

(*Mary Barton* italics mine106)

Here we see that it is not only the middle classes who are unaware of the situation of working poor.

Gaskell's device here is to present the proximity of the middle class to the lower as a contributing factor in the communication problem, and as an effective method of philanthropy. We see here that the servants have to a degree adapted the ignorance of the middle class. Though they are servants, working class people, they are oblivious to the situation of one of their own. If people of similar class are unaware of the situation of the working-class poor, how can a person of middle-class status possibly know the situation of the poor? There is a connection between the working-class servant and the middle class in their disregard to/ ignorance of the situation of the 'real' poor. Here we see that the servants who are in a good situation with enough to eat have no concept of what it is like to go hungry, they have *"forgotten"* what it was like to be poor, and the possibility never enters their heads that someone else is less fortunate to the degree of starvation. Here, the servant is as bad as the master for being oblivious to the situation of the poor. In earlier scenes in the novel the working classes go to great lengths to aid each other, precisely because they have a close personal connection with the people they are aiding. John Barton does not need to be reminded of his connection to Mrs. Wilson, he lives it, knows it implicitly. His social and domestic situation is within the working class, and only an extreme event has him experience the domesticity of the middle class. In this scene the servants appear to have lost the connection with others of their own class. The servant is certainly in a different social position/ class than the master, but the fact that one is attended to sufficiently initiates what

is presented as blindness to another's social reality, what Gaskell would see as a lack of sympathy. It also points out that working-class people have a reason to strike. The servants in this scene are working happily in a subservient position precisely because they have all they need. Here again the paternalist structure fits in with Gaskell's social commentary. Working-class people who are fully taken care of are those in the closest proximity to their employer. Mr Carson sees every day the value of his servants, as they perform their duties within his 'private space'-once again privilege is reproduced within the middle-class domestic scene. There is no way for him to be insulated from his servants as he is with his factory workers, as I shall illustrate later. By being as close as the servant is, the employer is fully cognizant of both their value and their social situation.

We can see Gaskell's use of the connective link of heritage in the language and the proximity of individuals helps to create a connection between characters in the novel. As Gaskell deploys the gloss, which in part signifies to the reader a commonality as well as a difference between working and middle class, the reader interpolates the character just as the novel interpolates the reader. The reader brings the working-class characters closer to the middle class by recognizing a common heritage and understanding, remembering a commonality between them without dissolving the difference of the working class. The text interpolates the reader by allowing the reader to understand the closeness, to become a part of the emotional facet of working-class language through the interpretive aid of the gloss, while once again realizing that the working classes are a separate identity from the middle class. Both middle and working class are able to preserve their exclusive identity, there is no call for one to adopt the habits of the other, while recognizing and becoming an integral

part of the other. The reader here is being reminded of a collective past of all English. The working class servant's memory lapse is tied to the forgetting of the middle class. We see from this scene that both the masters and their servants are 'unaware' of the working class situation. The gloss is a device for the reader to attempt to regain the closeness lost between the middle and lower classes. This scene demonstrates that it is possible for the working class and the middle class to represent themselves to one another; they in fact do it all the time, and the ability to represent themselves to one another is related to their mutual physical proximity.

Gaskell here presents the reader with an example of a fully operational social system as well as one in need of repair. The servants and the stableman are getting along famously, while Mr. Wilson sits in silence, his hunger turned to nausea. There is no suggestion in the kitchen conversation of any discontent amongst Mr. Carson's personal servants. His factory workers on the other hand are preparing to strike and murder his only son. In juxtaposition to the relative affluence of the servants, Mr. Wilson, after selling personal articles to provide himself with "food, light, and warmth", the narrator tells us that "for luxuries he would wait" (*Mary Barton 99*). Here again we see a class disparity in the concept of luxury and necessity. For Amy, Carson's little girl, necessity is a rose, which her father gives her without much argument. For John Barton, the narrator tells us anything beyond food an shelter is luxury. Possession of the bare necessities suggests a reduced potential for civil disobedience. The problem is that those who have the power to avoid social problems are oblivious to the situation of the laboring poor. Certainly the servants are willing to help the starving man, but they have forgotten what it was like to be in his position. This forgetting is related to the

servants proximity to relative affluence, and, paradoxically, facility with self representation across class boundaries. Because they are in close proximity to their employer, preforming their value to him in his living and breakfast room, Carson is intimately aware of their value and concerns. This is the mutual dependancy that Gaskell tells us is an integral part of a healthy social arrangement; an aspect that is lacking in the factory system.

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this scene is the fact that Wilson sits in complete silence. Within this social scene Wilson is completely unrepresented, but what is worse, he is unable to/ or does not represent himself. Neither the servants nor Mr. Carson has any knowledge of Wilson's situation, and, when he is in a position to tell those with the power to change his situation, he sits in silence. Each character is vested with a different linguistic position relative to their relationship to their employer. The difference between factory laborer, servant, and stableman may seem subtle, but the example presented here shows a linguistic difference between all three sections of the working class, and, we see a spacial relationship between language, interior and exterior space, and mutual proximity. Those servants who have the most contact with the employer also speak more like them. The servants working in the house speak without a trace of the Lancashire dialect. Thomas, the stableman, speaks with an affected Lancashire style but without a gloss. Mr. Wilson, one of Carson's factory workers, speaks in a Lancashire dialect, and his language is also at times glossed by the author. Those working closely to/ or even with the middle class do not need their language glossed; they apparently can represent themselves to the middle class adequately, and conversely, the middle class can communicate with their servants. In relation to the domestic scenes presented earlier, the servants speak with the same facility as

the middle class and are understood well by the middle class linguistically. We know that the working-class servants can represent themselves to the middle class because their language is without a gloss. The reader, put in the position of middle-class master, is assumed to be able to understand the servant, and thus there is no gloss within the language of the servant. To signify a difference, Gaskell presents the stableman with a Lancashire accent, but without a gloss, showing that the connection between stableman and master is strong, there is no need for an interpretive aid in his language, but not as strong as the middle-class connection to their servants because he is not an immediate part of the domestic scene. Members of the working class who are actually a part of the domestic scene, the servants in the scene, speak without the Lancashire style and free of the gloss. This connotes a relationship between the middle and certain parts of the working class where language does not need to be translated. Proximity to domestic intimacy allows for a freer communication, regardless of class. The closer any person is to the domestic situation of the middle class or the lower class allows them to represent themselves to the other adequately. This , in turn, is reflected in the language of the individual. Mr Wilson, then does not feel comfortable speaking to the servants in the room, because he is not a part of their domestic scene.

With middle-class language as a barometer of the dominant language, proximity to this language is presented in the text as relational to facility with the language. The stableman is not an immediate part of the domestic scene of the middle class, but his proximity to his master is closer than the factory worker, as I shall later demonstrate. His language retains a vestige of the Lancashire style, but it is not glossed demonstrating a middle ground between the factory worker and the stableman. The gentle movement up the social ladder

linguistically here presents the possibility for Wilson's silence. Even with similar social status, each are 'working class' people, there exists a linguistic difference between Mr. Wilson and Carson's personal servants that resists intercommunication. It would seem that the old platitude of paternalism is represented here once again. The economic situation of the characters is directly proportional to their proximity to their employers, and, this proximity is reflected in the modernity of language.

The link between class proper and the language of class becomes somewhat blurred at this point. There is a definite difference between the language of the middle class and the language of the working class, however, there is also a difference between the language of various sectors of the working class. The closer the relationship between the two classes, the better off socially and economically the person is; this is reflected in the language. The language that requires a gloss is the language of impoverishment. The language that is not glossed is the language of empowerment. The middle-class masters speak in a language that is not glossed, and so too do the domestic servants. Presumably, the closeness of Mr Carson to his servants allows him to be closely informed as to the situation of his servants. Also, the language that the his servants use closely resembles his own, illustrating the servants ability to converse in the masters language, where the master has less chance of misunderstanding his servant.

Mr. Wilson's economic state is exacerbated by his silence. Gaskell puts us in the mind of the servant to affect the understanding that there is no bad intention but a lack of knowledge as to the severity of the situation. The problem of the poor is not caused by an unfeeling middle class, lording their power over their workers, but rather a problem of simple

ignorance. We can see that Mr Carson is able to treat many people well. His daughter of course and his personal servants, all of whom are a part of his personal domestic situation. The closeness of these people, where the dominant language resides, the greater they are able to converse within it. We have seen Amy coerce her father into giving her a rose because of her close personal relationship with her father and her rhetorical skill with language. We have also seen that domestic servants in the Carson household are well taken care of. All of this happens not because of the action of one party or class but because of the mutual understanding of the two groups of people. As we have seen, there is a possibility of the working class to be ostracized from itself. The column in *Fraser's Magazine*, exclaiming that the novel *Mary Barton* will tell them "why working men turn Chartists and Communists," likewise illustrates that there is some bewilderment on the part of the middle class for all of the civil unrest.

Within this setting we have seen how class interaction can work, and also how certain interaction is not working, but have yet to see why this breakdown takes place in the first place. In chapter one we read that Lord John Manners say there was no more paternalistic system than the factory system. How then, does this picture of paternalistic perfection fall apart? As the scene presented above progresses, when Mr. Wilson is finally given audience with the senior Mr. Carson, Gaskell gives us an example of the communicative rift between the middle class and the working class, where this communicative rift is located, and shows how it presents the impedes appropriate action. The familial scene of Mr Carson and Amy is interrupted by a servant telling Mr Carson that a worker from the factory is there to see him. Wilson is then called in from the kitchen and is addressed by his employer:

'Well, Wilson, and what do you want today, man?'

'Please, sir, Davenport's ill of the fever, and I'm come to know if you've got an infirmary order for him?'

'Davenport-Davenport; who is the fellow? I don't know the name.'

'He's worked in your factory better nor three years sir.'

'Very likely, I don't pretend to know the names of the men I employ; that I leave to the overlooker. So he's ill eh?'

(*Mary Barton* 109)

An integral aspect of this communication is the fact that Wilson's speech is free of the gloss. The two previously mentioned scenes display a closeness between characters, one signaled by the presence of a gloss (Mrs. Wilson and John Barton) but another without (Amy and Mr. Carson). The question of why and where the gloss is presented raises itself once again, as its absence does not always perform distance, with Amy and Carson for instance, but appears to perform distance between the two characters here. While the reader is well aware of the severity of Mr. Davenport's illness and the urgency of Wilson's request, the master Mr Carson is unaware that such a person as Davenport works for him, much less is ill. As we shall see, the lack of knowledge/understanding each class has of the other that leads to a communicative breakdown, resentment and violence is the situation of the factories.

The distance between the masters and the workers is created by the fact that the owner of the mill, Mr. Carson, has an intermediary (the overlooker) which alleviates his responsibility for knowing the condition, or even the names, of his workers. The fact that there is no direct contact between the workers and their master suggests a problem. The

individual character of the worker is replaced by physical presence of the overlooker. As a representative of the worker proper, and the only factory worker with a personal relationship with the master, he alleviates the responsibility of the master to interact personally and know individually the situation of his workers. Everything left unrepresented by the overlooker remains absent in the mind of the master; in fact, to the master, the presence of the overlooker is the presence of his workers. Acting as the conduit between worker and master, the overlooker allows the master to remain distant from his employees. Thus insulated from the tawdry daily lives of the working-class person, Mr. Carson cannot know the state of his workers, because their state is represented by someone who is *not* them. Though this seems to be a minor problem for Mr. Carson, it is precisely this action that breeds the resentment of the lower-classes.

Gaskell is presenting more than simple callousness on the part of Mr. Carson. She explains that this callousness is wrought out of ignorance. With the overlooker raised to the status of universal synecdoche for the common worker, there is no need to understand working-class people individually, the overlooker takes the place of the real worker. For the middle class, it seems to be far too much to expect the factory owner to be able to know the intimate details of all of his employees. By not knowing the names of his employees Mr. Carson illustrates a rift between worker and master that is grounded in language. If Mr. Carson was to know the workers' name, he would have some sort of connection, through a word, to the welfare and identity of his employees. He obviously has the capacity to act kindly as we have seen with his daughter. The absence of any unrest within his home is an indication that the servants are attended to sufficiently. By replacing the individual with the

overlooker Carson insures an inaccurate representation of the workers. We once again see that the workers do not represent themselves; just as the march on London was Gaskell's representation of the workers political disempowerment, this scene represents that the working classes are not represented to the masters.

The lack of knowledge on the part of the master has a trickle down effect on the worker. When Mr. Wilson is in the kitchen, he makes no effort to demonstrate his hunger, and when he finally has an audience with Mr. Carson he fails to impart the severity of the situation. Mr. Wilson's appeal to his master has some effect; that is, Mr. Carson does act and gives Wilson an out patient order for the "following Monday". Though our narrator gasps at the prospect of having to wait- "Monday! How many days there were before Monday" (*Mary Barton 109*)- it is Mr. Wilson who is unable to verbally present to Mr. Carson that his friend Davenport is not merely ill, but is at death's door. However it is difficult to exculpate Mr. Carson because of ignorance. Though Mr. Carson does not understand precisely what Wilson is attempting to impart, but he is responsible for allowing the situation to get to this point. We can see here that not only do the two classes have different lexicons, but the analogous words in their lexicons can signify differently. For Wilson to circumvent proper channels (The overlooker) and interrupt his employer at his breakfast requires dire circumstances. The very act of directly asking his employer charges his words. However, Mr Carson is oblivious to this urgency. The problem in communication stems from Mr. Carson's neglect of his obligations as a Master. It is the duty of the Master, someone who has assumed a higher social and economic status, supplanting the aristocratic power structure, to know the situation of his workers. Mr. Carson feels as though he has fulfilled his Masterly

obligations because of his overlooker.

The overlooker, then, not only takes the place of the worker for the master, but takes the place of the master for the worker. The workers do not know the master precisely because of the intermediator. The intermediator becomes a cheap imitation of the Master, unable to impart the same moral sentiments that the servants in the kitchen experience. It is clear that the intermediary is fulfilling a communicative function, and it is also clear that his function is inadequately appraising the master of the social situation if his factory. Gaskell is driving home the point that the master does not/ cannot know the condition of the working poor, even if he has been told. In essence, the book does not present the 'real' story of the poor, but urges the masters to find it themselves. Gaskell so much as acknowledges that the poor are unrepresentable, and her representation of the relationship between the masters and the workers is as distorted as any, but her novel imparts an urgency for the masters *themselves* to go out and re-establish the link between master and worker rather than accept what they have heard second hand. The failure to convey the reality and gravity of the situation has Wilson leave hungry and consigns Davenport to death.

The physical distance between masters and workers makes impossible personal communication between the two classes. Because of the overlooker the workers do not access their master unless there is a dire need, as in the case of Mr Davenport. The fact that Wilson bypasses the overlooker, and that Carson obviously does not know the health situation of a long standing employee, shows that there is dire need, as well as demonstrating that the overlooker is not an effective method of communication between masters and the workers. The difficulty of this situation is that the overlooker creates a distance between the

masters and the workers, a distance that is partially responsible for the communicative problem as well. As mentioned earlier, the closeness between classes that is performed in language is relational to the physical proximity of the master to the worker. Earlier, the successful communication between Mr. Barton and Mrs. Wilson showed that each was familiar with the rules of a common discursivity; that is, they share a common lexicon which allows them to select language from a collective set of preconceived possibilities. The gloss is added for the benefit of the middle-class reader who is outside of working class discursivity. Wilson uses English when talking to Mr. Carson, but, unlike his speech earlier, English that does not require a gloss. It is important to note that we are once again within a domestic setting that is at once with and without a sense of familiarity. The absence of a gloss here indicates that Mr. Wilson is working outside his most comfortable mode of discourse, selecting language suitable to the situation and to an upper-class listener. If Wilson told Mr. Carson that his friend Davenport used to be a farrantly man but is now well nigh clemmed to death, Mr. Carson would very likely not comprehend the message. The existence of the gloss textually signals a level of comfort for the lower class character, working within a comfortable mode of discourse, demonstrated, for example, by the conversation between John Barton and Mrs Wilson. When a working-class character is speaking to the middle class, an adjustment is made by the lower class to accommodate for a middle class lexical deficiency. The reciprocal lack is working-class facility with the language. What Gaskell gives us is not only a lexical disparity, but the difference in how words and actions signify to members of a different class. The reader is aware that Davenport is close to death, giving the reader a working class context for action. Wilson's

move to ask the master for aid is done when "he's [Davenport] very bad" (*Mary Barton 109*) and all other personal sources have been exhausted. The distance created by the existence of the overlooker not only creates a linguistic divide, but has Mr. Carson doubly blind to the significance of one of his workers coming to see him. The fact that Wilson asks at all is a significant move, a move that Carson misses because he cannot read the situation correctly.

Mr Carson, to whom the absence of the gloss indicates he is working within a comfortable mode of discourse, treats Mr Wilson's request as though the man has a minor ailment, treating this as flippantly as he does his daughters request for a rose. The difference in his action is due to the difference in context. He does not understand that there is a dire need. The notion of need and luxury are working within the same paradigm as his daughters request for a rose. He does in fact do what he is asked, but it is clear that he does not understand the gravity of the situation.

Knowing that words like nesh and farrantly do not exist in the lexicon of the middle-class person, the difference between the middle class and the lower class is in fact dissolved by middle class distance. Because of the middle class possession of the dominant language, and their power to enforce it as the dominant language, the working classes must conform to middle-class language when interacting with the middle class. This is doubly problematic as the distance that requires the working class to adopt the dominant form of discourse also prohibits access to it. We know about the distance between the master and the worker because of Carson's mention of his overlooker that takes the place of personal interaction. The fact that Carson brings up the overlooker demonstrates that the overlooker is ignorant to the situation of Davenport, and, that the overlooker is an insufficient stand in for the

working class. The working class also cannot use their own language because the distance of the master to the worker makes these words foreign to him. But, the fact that the working class have limited access to the masters, makes it impossible for them to learn the language of the middle class, and gain facility (Like Amy) so they can adequately converse within it.

Any communication between classes has the working class approximating middle classness through language. Because the middle class will not understand the intimate language of the lower class, the lower class must attempt to converse with the middle class in their own language to preserve any hope for efficacious communication. This is tantamount to presenting the working class in the way the middle class want, effacing the difference of the lower class and reducing them to middle-class understanding, allowing the middle class to judge any action within a middle class context. The demand for the lower class to 'play' middle class, present themselves as middle class when dealing with their masters, requires an innate misrepresentation of self as well as a signal to the middle class that they are in fact 'no different' from themselves. This, much like the scene within the kitchen, illustrates that the proximity of the people in this scene presents a problem in understanding. The lack of contact between the master and his workers, partially due to the overlooker, is responsible for the lower class being unable to communicate adequately with the middle class, and responsible for the middle class not recognizing the difference of the lower class. By adjusting his language to accommodate Carson, Wilson limits the scope of his own expression and thus its efficacy. Carson is unable to grasp the tenor of the situation because the information given to him is inadequate, but the presentation is a social requirement that the middle classes themselves demand. He is without the benefit of the

gloss that would give him access to the discursivity of the lower classes. Carson understands perfectly the words relayed to him, but the words are insufficiently charged.

The breakfast scene at the Carson home shows that the two conversants in fact have two distinct lexicons, and Wilson is not competent enough in what has become the dominant form of English to say what he means. That they do not share the same lexicon of language means that they have different conditions, (preconceived possibilities) that need to be met for their speech acts to be successfully completed. What is performed in this scene is the creation of poverty, in part, by the poor themselves, and, the signification of a lack in lower class self representation. If the poor use their own language, the upper-class people will not understand them because of the lexical disparity; and if they use a language understandable by the wealthy, the lower-class people are unable to fully express themselves. The lack of expression here is reflexive of the situation of the march on London, where the lower classes were unable to get their message heard. As we shall see later, this problem does not go away in the novel. The performative aspect of Mr. Carson's speech shows that the conditions of discourse have not been fully met. Mr. Carson certainly has the authority to present Mr. Wilson with the proper medical aid, but does not feel the need to do so. Also, the performative nature of the conversation between John Barton and Mrs. Wilson fulfills many unspoken requirements for the speech act to be successful. For Austin, for a performative speech act to be successful the speaker and the listener must share a contextual understanding of the others position. Just as the speaker uttering the words "I bet" has to have the authority to bet, that is, a position that allows the receiver to understand that the words uttered have the proper intention and that the performativity of the words will be fulfilled. This authority

can be achieved by either a past history, of betting or whatnot, or vested by a certain position. A good Catholic does not go to his grocer to give his confession, no matter how forgiving the fellow may be, simply because he is not vested with the same power to give absolution. For this, a priest is needed; and the authority of the priest to give absolution is beyond reproach. The priest does not need to be particularly good at hearing confession to give absolution, he simply needs to be ordained. Within inter class communication, the working class attempt to assume the context of the middle class, but because of their own lack of facility within this linguistic context, created by the distance between master and worker, the speech act is not successful.

The two preceding scenes express the ability of people of like class to communicate with each other, and that proximity to the dominant language, the language of the middle class, creates a context that allows for greater linguistic communication and a stronger mutual understanding which in turn forges a sympathetic bond between the classes. We have also seen that when a working class person is injected into the domestic scene of the middle class, the masters are not without sympathy but are unable to gauge the severity of the situation. In the preface to *Mary Barton* Gaskell discusses the emotional intensity of the lower classes, their ability (or lack thereof) to understand and fix the social problem they are faced with. In comments that potentially show a biased perspective of the lower class, Gaskell addresses what she feels is a vengeful attitude of so many of the "poor uneducated factory-workers of Manchester" (Gaskell's preface to *Mary Barton*, 37). She claims to be writing *Mary Barton* because she is "anxious to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this *dumb* people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy

of the happy, or of *erroneously* believing that such is the case" (*Mary Barton* 38 italics mine). Her comment here leaves out the subtlety of later remarks, and expresses both the animosity of the working-class individual towards the affluent, and their inability to express their concerns. By calling the lower-class people 'dumb' and 'uneducated' Gaskell also potentially biases the readers understanding of both the capabilities of the lower classes and their ability to express themselves. She seems here to be 'setting up' the reader for a depiction of a spiteful lower class, who have mistakenly come to the belief that the middle class is getting rich on the blood of the workers. Gaskell here says that she wishes to give utterance to the agony that the lower classes feel, but does not explicitly say whether these feelings are legitimate, or whether they are backed up by a material reality.

From a single anecdotal example of one on one communication between a master, Mr. Carson, and a worker, Mr. Wilson, we have found that the problem in communication is rooted in the lack of familiarity between the two classes. Giving credence to an aristocratic point of view, Gaskell points that this responsibility falls on the shoulders of the masters, a responsibility that in Mr. Carson's situation he has relegated to an overlooker. Moving back into the public realm, we can see the rift between masters and workers is so deeply rooted that it closes off any concession from the masters. Without the personal connection of domestic surroundings, the middle class deals with the workers as a lumpen political force even though they know details of personal hardships suffered by individual workers. Here we see the masters viewing the workers as a potentially powerful political force, but one whose methods are unacceptable. Gaskell outlines the resolve of the middle class and explains that the masters are worried about any appearance of weakness. The

masters by and large do not lack sympathy, but chafe against the brutish expression of this 'dumb uneducated' lot of factory workers, and fear stronger reprisals if the workers feel their own power growing too strong. Before a meeting with the representatives of the workers and the masters, the masters express both sympathy and resolve:

> "poor devils! They're near enough to starving, I'm afraid. Mrs. Alfred makes two cow's heads into soup every week, and people come several miles to fetch it; and if these times last we must try and do more. But we must not be bullied into anything!"
>
> "A rise of a shilling or so, won't make much difference, and they will go away thinking they've won their point."
>
> "That's the very thing I object to. They'll think so, and whenever they've a point to gain, no matter how unreasonable, they'll strike work."
>
> (*Mary Barton* 232)

The masters here express a kind of sympathy toward the plight of the working-class people, but refuse to give up their authority as Masters. The fear expressed here is that any show of weakness compromises their authority. We see here that W.R. Greg's ethic (see page 18 above) of the poor being left to themselves reasserts itself as a prominent middle-class ethic. The underlying ethic of capitalism is equal opportunity for all, but this comes with responsibility to all. Just like Mr Carson with Wilson, the masters here are caught in the double bind of believing that the lower classes are in their position because of some specific deficiency, but expect them to speak for themselves in the proper manner. Carson with his

dealings with Wilson assumes that if Davenport was in fact dying that Mr. Wilson or the overlooker would have told him so. The miscommunication has the working classes feeling as though they need to get the attention of the masters, and the masters doubly baffled and fearful of what they perceive to be irrational and unprovoked outbursts of violence. The masters in this scene are implicitly distrustful of the workers while demanding that the worker in turn implicitly trust them.

This is certainly not the sense of sympathy that Kate Flint feels Gaskell is out to emphasize. The masters, it would seem, know certain intimate details of lower class life, but they are not "looking forward for others," a major tenet of the sympathy Kate Flint believes Gaskell encourages. For the masters, a unified front is the only way to deal with the lower-class people and retain an assured hold on power. The working classes here are certainly able to represent themselves, but their attempts at self representation go unrecognized or are unacceptable to the middle class. Strike action is not, to the middle class, an acceptable method of social intervention or representation; but for the starving working class, it seems the only way to draw attention to their situation, the only way for the masters to notice them at all. Unanimously refusing all demands of the workers, despite knowing the hardship of some of the workers, expresses resolve and fear of losing power and resolve to keep it at whatever price. The result of the action of the masters in this scene as a collective is equivalent to the action of Mr Carson dealing with his workforce through the overlooker. We can assume that the overlooker did not tell Mr Carson of the situation of Davenport, and was thus not in a position to do anything. Here, the masters do know some of the details of the poor but refuse to help. The common thread within these two scenarios is the lack of

personal connection between the classes. The overlooker as synecdoche is a misrepresentation of the personal situation of the worker. This misrepresentation creates a breakdown in communication and Carson acts in a less than helpful manner towards Davenport. Likewise, the fact that the workers make demands on the masters, and take the position of potentially striking, illustrates that they are in a desperate position. The lack of context for the middle class shows that these actions are illegal and inappropriate. The workers as individuals seem worthy of aid (Mrs Alfred makes two sheep's heads into soup) but the mass of demanding workers misrepresents the individual and therefore must be given nothing.

Once again the spatial relationship of the two groups presents itself. Because the workers are distant from Mr. Carson, and we can presume similar situations exist within other factories, the employers have only a business context to understand the political actions of the workers. The situation in the place of employment is far removed from the familial situation in the Carson household. The latitude that Mr. Carson allows his daughter is not present here. Because of his close relationship with his daughter and in turn her tacit trust in her father to act in her best interests, allows Amy to get what she desires and allows Mr. Carson to adjudicate the notion of extravagance versus need in an informed and sympathetic manner. For the master worker relationship, the distance between the two, created in part by the overlooker, disallows a proper and sympathetic reaction form the masters because they are working within two different contexts of the same social problem. We can see here that the paradigm of paternalism discussed in chapter one is not at work in the public realm. Though the workers are treated like children, there is no tacit understanding that the masters

are working for the best interests of the workers, banishing any sense of security and trust. Because the masters view the lower classes as attending only to their personal needs, the masters fear the potential of constant strikes once the workers learn of their power.

Conclusion

The final scene of reconciliation in *Mary Barton* is an ambiguous one. The murder of Mr. Carson's son is a working-class reaction to the meeting between the masters and workers. While this face to face meeting is unsuccessful in achieving a mutual understanding and a solution to the labour trouble, it is not the meeting or forum that is at fault but acommunicative disjunction. The caricature of the workers is the last straw, a final example that the masters have a completely false notion of what the working classes are like, and likewise presents a false notion to the working classes that the masters are cold and uncaring towards the plight of the poor. It is this miscommunication that sparks the violence between the two classes. After the death of Mr Carson's son, John Barton's need for absolution is held in the hands of a master. This face to face encounter takes place in the working-class home of John Barton, where Carson is asked to fulfill a request that seems at once impossible and absurd: to forgive his son's murderer. The scene creates a tangible connection between the two classes, and shows that final absolution comes through language.

John Barton's request for forgiveness comes in his own home, where Mr Carson comes face to face with not only his son's murderer, but with the squalid surroundings that John Barton calls home. Reflecting on his own position as working class turned master, Carson recognizes the difference between his humble beginnings and John Barton's current state:

> In the days of his childhood and youth, Mr Carson had not be unaccustomed to poverty: but it was honest decent poverty; not the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton's house, and which contrasted strangely with the pompous sumptuousness of the room in which he now sat. Unaccustomed wonder filled his mind at the reflection of the different lots of the brethren of mankind.
>
> (*Mary Barton* 439)

By visiting the poverty of his workers, Mr Carson revisits his own past, remembers his own poverty and realizes that he was in fact privileged in his poverty. By recognizing that not everyone from the lower classes has the opportunity to become middle class, Mr Carson comes closer to understanding why his son was murdered, and, "why working men turn Chartists and Communists." This ideological change comes only after a material confrontation with the 'real' conditions of the working classes.

Mr Carson's reflection comes as he is on his way to summon the constable to arrest John Barton for murder. With John Barton's request for forgiveness brutally rejected, Carson witnesses a scene of kindness in the streets between a young street urchin and a little girl of privilege. After being knocked down by the boy, the little girl "put[s] up her little mouth to be kissed by her injurer, just as she had been *taught* to do at *home* to make peace" (*Mary Barton* 438 italics mine). By acting in public how she was taught at home, the little girl's actions fit into the paternalist model of social construction and blur the distinction between interior and exterior space. When Mr Carson hears a passer by say "that lad will mind, and

be more gentle for the time to come, I'll be bound, thanks to that little lady" (*Mary Barton 438*) we see that the ethic of paternalism is not limited to the home, and that the site of privilege needs to be extended to the exterior world and into the factories. Carson is able to juxtapose the interior (home) space from his own personal experience and is able to realize that not all of his workers have had the same opportunities as he has.

It is difficult to completely rationalize Gaskell's moment here as both the street urchin and John Barton need forgiveness from those in a higher class. There is still a sense here of a greater crime, and an allocation of guilt to a certain class. By ascribing guilt Gaskell suggests that fitness to the proper morality is bound up with affluence. The disparity between the street urchin and the little girl is that it is the little girl who takes it upon herself to fix the situation out of her compassion for others who might not deserve it. She knows what proper action is and demonstrates that she has had the benefit of a good upbringing through her act of forgiveness towards the young boy. One troubling aspect of this scene is that with her act of forgiveness she removes his agency. She speaks for the young boy saying that he "did not know what he was doing" (*Mary Barton* 438). This echoes John Barton's direct words to Mr Carson which, for a time, go unheard. Barton later expresses the difficulty for a poor man to act in a morally upright manner:

> You see I've so often been hankering after the right way; and it's a hard one for the poor man to find. At least it's been so to me. No one learned me, and no one telled me. When I was a little chap they taught me to read, and then they ne'er gave me no books; only I heard say the Bible was a good book.

(*Mary Barton* 440)

John later complains that he left the morality of the Bible because he was unable to see any gain to come of it, and, more importantly, the masters seemed to live a life contrary to proper Biblical morality. Gaskell attempts here to delicately traverse the problem of education as well as responsibility. The poor cannot be completely exculpated for their actions, but there must be some recognition within the masters that their actions effect the working classes.

This passage points to the source of ethical action and that it must be learned by all. For Mr Carson, we can see that there was either an absence within his own household, where he did not have a proper upbringing that allowed him to interact publicly like the aristocracy would like and that Gaskell seems to suggest, or, he recognizes that the place of personal origin has a hand in creating and allocating class. Mr Carson, and the shrewd middle class reader should see the double bind- that there is a relationship between home life and economic/social possibilities, and that it is the responsibility of those who have gained power to aid not only their personal family, but use it to teach the public at large.

The lesson that Carson has failed to learn was how to listen to the working class and how to make them understand that he too is listening. In one of the final scenes in the novel, after Jem's acquittal, and Carson finally is able to forgive John Barton, Job Leigh and Jem Wilson are summoned to the Carson home. The tragedy of losing his son has drawn Mr. Carson try to understand the situation of the poor, and grapple with the causation of the tragedy. The very summoning is evidence that Carson is, like the little girl, making an amelioratory gesture to the working classes. However, at the end of the conversation Mr Carson is still unable to understand the self representation of the lower classes and is ready

to write off the meeting as achieving nothing but Job objects:

> Thank you for coming,- and for speaking candidly to me. I fear, Legh, neither you nor I have convinced each other, as to the power, or want of power in the masters, to remedy the evils the men complain of.
>
> I'm loth to vex you sir, just now; but it was not the want of power I was talking on; what we all feel sharpest is the want of inclination to try and help the evils which come like blights at times over the manufacturing places, while we see the masters can stop work, and not suffer. If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy,- even if they were long about it,- even if they could find no help, and at the end of the day could only say, "poor fellows, our hearts are sore for ye; we've done all we could, and can't find a cure," -we'd bear up like men through bad times. No one knows till they've tried, what power of bearing lies in them, if once they believe that men are caring for their sorrows, and will help if they can. If fellow creatures can give nought but tears, and brave words, we take our trials straight from God, and we know enough to of His love to put ourselves blind into his hands. You say, our talk has done no good. I say it has. I see the view you take on things from the place where you stand. I can remember that, when the time comes for judging you, I sha'nt think any longer, does he act right on my views of a thing, but does he act right on his own. It has done me good in that way. I'm an old man, and may never see you again; but I'll

> pray for you, and think on you and your trials, both of your great wealth, and of your son's cruel death.
>
> (*Mary Barton* 458)

The ideological character movement here is from the lower-class person, not the upper class, that is, it is the working class people who feel that something has been achieved, not because they have been understood, but because they have been taken seriously. This is achieved simply because of an attempt to communicate. The perspective of Mr. Carson has not changed, but the fact that he attempts to understand the poor people creates a space for the poor to learn what is necessary for them to accept their position within society. Here Job specifically asks not for a solution, but an attempt at understanding the plight of the poor. The only action that is needed is in fact an attempt at understanding. The only accusation levied at the upper classes is that they did not even attempt to understand the working class position, nor did they allow lower classes to understand the masters position. This face to face meeting is free of political charge and tired stereotype showing that Mr Carson is trying to do what he can for the working class.

Troubling in this passage is the fact that Carson still does not understand his workers. At the end of their conversation he is unable to recognize what they have accomplished. Even in this face to face meeting Carson is unable to understand its effects, and it is the working class that must make up the extra ground. Gaskell's moderate position is at this point a preventative measure for the middle class, a method of preventing civil disobedience. The message here is to the middle classes, to observe that there is a difference between the middle class and the lower classes that is acceptable. The gloss represents a missed

opportunity. The working classes have a voice, and it is not a voice of violence; rather, violence is the irruption of the absence of voice. When Gaskell uses a gloss to draw the working class characters in *Mary Barton*, the authenticity of the character is not at issue. What is more importantly brought home is the recognition of a breakdown, and of the fact that there is a voice there, that has sailed past the ears of the middle-class people of nineteenth century England.

Notes

1.See especially Lacalu and Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Verso 1985. Their thesis suggests that elements in themselves do not inhere meaning, but are "free floating" until articulated into a signifying chain. Thus the concept freedom does not in itself contain any absolute meaning unless understood under the rubric of capitalism, communism etc. The point is that neither of the hegemonic signifying chains is 'true', but each has a relational understanding of provisional truth.

2. See Thompson Chapter Eight in *The Rise of Respectable Society.*

3.The most negative reviews of *Mary Barton* confronted Gaskell's depiction of working class life with testimonials of their own. In *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Critical Heritage* three articles stand out: No. 16- John Relly Beard *British Quarterly Review.* 1 February 1849, ix, 117-36. No. 17- An unsigned review in the *Manchester Guardian.* 28 February 1849, 7; 7 March 1849, 8. No 23- William Rathbone Greg. *Edinburgh Review.* April 1849 Ixxix, 402-35.

4. The reform act of 1832 lowered the enfranchisement requirements from property ownership to 10 pounds yearly rental. Though this evened the scales, it was not universal suffrage. The middle classes were granted political representation, but the working classes class were not.

5.See especially Laqueur, Thomas W. *Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative*

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